

FEUDAL EVENTS,

OR,

DAYS OF YORE.

An Ancient Story.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

ANNA MARIA MACKENZIE,

AUTHOR OF NEAPOLITAN, DUSSELDORF, &c. &c.

—•••••—
“Providence never intended that any state here should be completely
“happy, or entirely miserable. If greatness flatter our vanity, it
“multiplies our dangers; if opulence increase our gratifications, it
“increases in the same proportion our desires and demands: but
“assemble all the evils which poverty, disease, or violence can inflict,
“and their stings will be found far less pungent than those which
“guilty passions dart into the heart.”

BLAIR.

—•••••—
VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED AT THE

Minerva-Press,

FOR WILLIAM LANE, LEADENHALL-STREET.

1800.

18495.1-42

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY,
THE GIFT OF
FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY
Dec 26, 1934

W

DAYS OF YORE.

CHAP. I.

THE absence of Sir William and her fallen competitor gave the Empress a transient respite from the practice of that hypocrisy which now became extremely necessary to the accomplishment of new schemes, and still deeper plans—and in all the solitary state of unsocial greatness, she passed several hours, approving or rejecting those ideas which her fertile imagination sought to arrange—When

DAYS OF YORE.

suddenly starting from the couch where she had thrown herself — “No,” cried she—“I must not indulge these chimerical notions—*He* cannot forget—or, *if he could—I* never could be *his*.”

The subject was inimical to her proud spirit—It was *not* to be pursued—therefore, catching up a taper, she rushed into the gallery which communicated with all the chambers on that story, and took several hasty turns in all the agony of a perturbed mind—When suddenly casting an unquiet glance over the gloomy obscurity which several half-expiring lamps contributed to increase, she shuddered—Another subject for lasting regret pressed upon recollection, which the present scene heightened to a degree of terror. She could not help reverting to past scenes — The figure of the persecuted Matilda filled her imagination; and in a recess formed by a saxon arch, whose
pillars

pillars projected beyond the stone walls, she almost fancied the weeping maid kneeling before a crucifix, and wasting a harmless life in tears of anguish and disappointment.

In that retributive moment, of how little effect were the consolations held out by pride and gratified ambition. Matilda—destroyed, as was too probable by *her* cruel machinations, presented, by the illusion of a disturbed conscience, a picture that deadened every lively expectation of future glory—and forced even a tear of bitter compunction.

Thus passed a miserable hour in which the repentant princess experienced the inefficacy of earthly resolutions. “I cannot,” she thought, “restore, even if living, the object of Stephen’s former affections—But I can give him his freedom—I can conciliate his esteem,

“ and bind him to my cause by motives
“ of interest—Yes, much-wronged cou-
“ sin, it shall be the business of Maud’s
“ future life to atone for her former in-
“ justice.” With this resolution she at-
tempted to blunt the acuteness of her
sensations; but still the picture she had
fancied reverted to her imagination—
Matilda was in the fore-ground of the
piece, and to destroy an illusion so glar-
ing the arch became a subject of investi-
gation—And she stood contemplating the
statue of a Saxon goddess, whose attitude
corresponded with the idea her present
feelings had so superstitiously created.

While thus deeply attentive to the
subject of her meditation, Maud was ef-
fectually disturbed by a faint and hollow
groan, which appeared to arise from the
base of the statue; and before she could
recover from the horror it excited, ano-
ther more shrill and feeble fixed her to
the

the spot, when the sound of distant voices once more aroused her to a sense of recollection—and she was hastily quitting the gallery, when glancing towards the arch she perceived a low door in the back of it. A sudden impulse which has sometimes been mistaken for courage, induced the Empress to examine it more closely; when finding it shake beneath her hand, she felt much of her apprehensions abated from the idea that it communicated with the lower apartments—But the indications of distress which still vibrated on her nerves, from whence could they arise—The voices too—“Perhaps,” thought the perplexed monarch, “some treachery is agitating—” “This door,” and she gently pressed against it, “may admit the traitors—” “and yet I have no reason for such suspicions.”

While thus debating, she cautiously shook it, which suddenly yielding, discovered a flight of stone steps that terminated in a small arched passage, illuminated with a lamp; and again the faint tones of distress met her ear, mixed with the foothings of compassion. It now struck the Empress, that Stephen's apartment must be somewhere near this passage, and without one instant's deliberation she lightly descended—At the bottom of the steps a kind of hatch opened to a narrow, but lofty room, from the opposite side of which, a light issued through a half closed door—Here Maud suddenly stopped—for she could plainly distinguish the low complainings of a female voice.

Entirely relieved from any fear of danger, she advanced with a view of elucidating this mystery—and softly entering the room, beheld an elegant woman

man reclining on the bosom of Sir William de Evreux—At her feet knelt the empaffioned Stephen, whose eyes overflowing with tendernefs, were fixed on the lovely form before him—With a soft and tremulous movement the Emprefs imperceptibly reached this interesting group—and at the same instant discovered in the object of Stephen's fond admiration Matilda—the fo recently deplored, and long loft Matilda.

Fearfully, and as if confcious of all the evils this untimely event would produce, Matilda clung ftill clofer to the ancient friend, by whom fhe was fupported—While Stephen, arifing, clasped his hands as though deprecating the wrath which was rapidly collecting in the enflamed countenance of his unwelcome gueft; who ftepping towards Sir William, gazed with a half-believing eye on the almoft lifelefs burthen; while a fentiment com-

A 4 posed

posed of disappointment, hatred, revenge and jealousy, gave her working features a terrible expression.

That the Count was married, and father of a son, had long been known to the Empress; but that *Matilda of Bologne* should be the mother of his infant, was left to the present scene to illustrate—For strange as it might appear, it had been a constant object of Stephen's care, to keep the real origin of his comfort a secret, till safely seated on the English throne, he might produce her as the defeater of a proud and resentful woman's claim. Not that in the common course of things, such an intention could have succeeded; but the secret, yet long indulged hopes of two illustrious families had reduced this resolution to a certainty; and the houses of Blois and Bologne, in consideration of Maud's vindictive and suspicious disposition, united
in

in a deception that might lull her fears in a happy security, till they could congratulate their offspring in the most decided way.

What a moment then was this for the Empress—and how soon the tear which a suddenly awakened conscience had left upon her cheek was dried by the burning blush of malignant anger. All the late energies of her soul, which, while she believed the injured woman had fallen a prey to *her* machinations, were expressed by sighs and tears, now vanished with their effects—and Matilda became once more the subject of uncontrolled rage—And when Stephen, who in that perilous moment felt more for his wife than a sense of his personal danger could create, interposed between her and the Empress, dreading the consequence of a fury so untamable, Maud retreated—and while scarcely able to denounce the

vengeance she meditated, bid him with a sarcastic, yet menacing air—"make the most of his precious moments."

Too well was this hint understood by the wretched trio; and Sir William, who felt an awkward consciousness of dissimulation, had not offered a word during his monarch's presence, no sooner beheld her wrathful departure, then he exclaimed—"Now, by my spurs, Count, the hour of destruction is at hand—and we must indeed make the most of time if you wish to save this poor thing from the malice which is ready to destroy her." Matilda sighed deeply, and raising her head, glanced towards the door through which her enemy had departed—and then with a touching and impressive look entreated Stephen would take the opportunity, which an instant might invalidate, to escape the consequence of this detection—"Fear not for *me*," she added—"It

“ It is *you* she means to ruin. Compara-
 “ tively speaking *I* am safe—*I* cannot en-
 “ danger the crown she so tenaciously va-
 “ lues, when *you* are beyond her reach—
 “ But (interrupting herself) another—
 “ Oh, my love, another dear and pre-
 “ cious victim must, as well as you, be
 “ sacrificed to her ambition—Eustace—
 “ the sweet, the innocent Eustace—In
 “ yours his death or safety must be in-
 “ volved. Fly then and snatch from
 “ her fiend-like grasp, our dear and
 “ lovely child ”—“ Yes my beloved, we
 “ will both go; Sir William will com-
 “ passionate a helpless family, consigned
 “ to the charge of a gallant friend—that
 “ friend will not desert us. But what
 “ am I saying—Perish the selfishness that
 “ would involve a generous protector,
 “ and disgrace the principles he has ever
 “ so vigorously asserted.”

“ Sir

“ Sir William,” cried Matilda, with a solemn, yet eager distress—“ Is it—
“ Oh, say—Is it incompatible with your
“ honor—your fealty to the present government, to liberate my husband?
“ Speak—I conjure you, speak! Can
“ you resolve to devote him to irreparable misery?” “ You are a woman,” answered de Evreux, “ and
“ no judge of the sentiments which loyalty professes—I have the feelings of a
“ man, but they actuate a Roman’s heart
“ — Maud is my sovereign—but Stephen
“ is my friend. For the latter I would
“ suffer much—but for the former I
“ would *die*! One I sincerely love—
“ the other I respect—And while prejudice cannot blind me to her faults, it
“ is equally incapable of warping my
“ principles. She has a right to my
“ services as a sovereign, and one of those
“ services is to defend her throne”—
“ No more, Sir William—I deduce your
“ inference;

“ inference ; my husband’s liberty you
“ are persuaded would shake that throne
“ — therefore you cannot emancipate
“ him ” — “ But I can do that, which in
“ his estimation will be equally dear — I
“ have a relation, prioress to the monas-
“ tery without the gates, where *you* may
“ be securely hidden ” — “ Enough —
“ Enough,” cried the ardent Stephen,
transported to imagine the safety of his
adored lady — “ Take her, Sir William —
“ and as you estimate your eternal soul,
“ defend this sweet creature — But see,
“ the dawn is at hand — Waste not ano-
“ ther moment — Light will be *my* chains,
“ and bearable every suffering which in-
“ cludes not in their grasp my worship-
“ ped wife ” — “ No, Stephen, here
“ will I stay ” — and she seated herself on
the marble pavement — “ This cold and
“ impenetrable bed shall be mine, till
“ Maud pronounces our wretched fate —
“ If we must die, we will die together.”

“ And

“ And your *son*, lady ” — “ Ah ! what of
“ him, Sir William ? ” — “ Poor innocent
“ youth,” said de Evreux, seemingly
unheeding her — “ thy doom is hard —
“ A mother’s fostering arms *might* save
“ thy life ; but *she* refuses, and *thou* too
“ must die.” “ My child ! My child !
“ Distract me not, Sir William — but say
“ — *How* am I to preserve my child ? ”
“ By flying with me to the monastery ” —
“ Oh, then, let us hasten to protect
“ him ” — But here she stopped — and
fixing a soul piercing look upon her hus-
band, whose eye, fraught with love and
grief, bent its mournful beams upon her
agitated countenance, while she pitiously
added — “ But — *must I leave thee ?* ”
A sudden noise as of doors opening in
the apartments adjoining, occasioned a
fearful interruption ; and with a gentle
violence the friendly de Evreux forced
her from the passionate embrace of her
devoted consort — while a bitter tear
evinced

evinced the unhappy prisoner's reluctance to surrender his distressed Matilda.

To judge of the various feelings which successively tortured the bosom of a monarch so fastidious as Maud—whose misery arose from the enjoyment of that power she so highly appreciated, can only be done by an estimation of her situation. Deceived for years into a belief that the object of a thousand fears and cares could no more excite apprehension or disgust, Maud had conquered the fixed antipathy that object once incurred; and at the very moment when retrospection obtruded its unwelcome pangs, they were stifled by the necessity of reviewing the very persecutions which had induced them—Even the candid and heroic de Evreux was included in the fiat her rage denounced against the Count and Countess. To *him*, as to the soul of honor she had entrusted the charge of her enemy

my—and to *his* partiality that enemy owed the highest indulgence. “Yes,” she cried, while starting from the couch which mental agony rendered intolerable—“*He* too shall die—*He* to whose professions of loyalty no credit can be given, shall suffer with my mortal foe. “Oh, Stephen!” and she uttered a convulsive groan—“Well dost thou reward the meltings of a heart which so lately throbbed in thy favor.”

The approach of her attendants now reminded her of the lapse of time—she immediately robed herself; and sending for a Baron who she was well assured would not dispute her commands, issued orders for the removal of Stephen to the dungeon of the castle. Soon after which, two pages were introduced—and the intelligence they brought, that Earl Gloucester requested an audience, recalled her thoughts to the shock the scene she had

had to depict would occasion to that nobleman; but to *him* the *choice* of Stephen was no secret—and her arrival in England which took place in the preceding week, was announced to him by one who knew her person, and from whom he had collected enough of that unfortunate lady's sufferings as not only to criminate the sister he could almost despise, but completely to exculpate the innocent Matilda from every shadow of duplicity or indelicacy. This informant was father Benedict, who happened to be officiating in a church at Canterbury, where Matilda had stopped, (in consequence of a vow made to the saint whose name it bore) to return thanks for her speedy voyage from Barfleur.

The sight of a lady once so persecuted, created a wish in father Benedict to render her some service; and as he was possessed with the information that she was
confort

confort to the deposed monarch, it occurred to the penitent father that a discovery of the wrongs she had sustained from Maud, (if made to the noble minded Gloucester) might procure some mitigation of her present calamities, and exonerate himself from the burthen of a confidence, which even a considerable promotion in the church could not lighten.

Certainly his engagements with the Empress would be broken by this communication, but the tale he had formerly fabricated respecting Matilda, with which the Empress had been so completely deceived in the earlier part of her life, was a proof that his integrity was not incorruptible; indeed the character of Earl Robert, and his fraternal partiality, exceedingly lessened both the hazard and culpability of it, as he had every reason to suppose whatever was committed to
him

him under the seal of secrecy, that nobleman considered as inviolable—and Benedict felt assured, that were it otherwise, Maud would never be acquainted with his knowledge of such an event, least it should occasion any fruitless uneasiness.

With this impression the father hastened to Gloucester, and unfolded all he knew respecting Matilda; at the same time freely confessing his own error in so long concealing a procedure, which, for aught *he* knew to the contrary, might have occasioned a train of misfortunes to an innocent lady.

With equal astonishment to that of his sister, though with far different feelings, did the Earl receive this wonderful intelligence—which brought forward to his recollection the trying scenes so painfully destructive of a matrimonial establishment; while the consciousness that his

own bitter disappointment had eventually produced to the object of his truest affections, the happiness she so well deserved, sweetened the idea that he should see her as the wife of another—A sure proof of the purity of those principles, which governed a heart so fond, so grateful, and so tender.

After struggling with the distressing retrospection, which impelled a sacred tear, Earl Robert forced his thoughts into another channel; and *how* to procure to this adored subject of his honorable attachment, the accomplishment of her wishes became his next consideration. From the priest he understood that Matilda had privately renewed her journey towards Winchester—And much he dreaded the rage of Maud, should she discover her rival's vicinity. Stephen was by that time on his road to that city—and it would be necessary to attempt

tempt to conciliate the furious Maud, previous to an interview with her prisoner — “ And *that*,” decided the generous Earl, “ must be *my* business.

We have already seen the consequence of Robert’s interference, whose warmth at his sister’s unfeminine rage had nearly conquered his discretion. To wait for the unhappy Stephen was the next impulse of his heart—But to hazard a meeting with his lovely consort—*that could not be*. To Sir William de Evreux, then, he committed the whole of father Benedict’s secret, in contradiction to that holy man’s dependance upon his integrity ; but the urgency of Gloucester’s motive was a sufficient excuse for the seeming impropriety—as the veteran was appointed to the business of attending Stephen at Winchester, which would consequently empower him to be an essential assistant to the gentle Matilda, should

should she need either protection or advice.

Delighted to hear she was yet in being, Sir William readily promised every exertion of friendship in her favor, and immediately appointed several trusty veterans to watch her arrival. In this they were happily successful ; and on the evening previous to Maud's unwelcome visit, Sir William had presented to his enraptured prisoner the sweetest succedaneum for his regretted liberty—when a few short hours, consumed in tears, complainings, tender remonstrances and cruel terrors, put a period to the hope of more tranquil moments.



CHAP. II.

IN the certainty that Earl Gloucester had procured to the subject of his earliest affections the utmost gratifications her heart could experience, he enjoyed a pure yet unpermanent delight, which the sudden appearance of Sir William de Evreux soon converted to poignant regret; as from the good knight's hasty representation, he foreboded the most terrible consequences to Matilda and her lord. "I have concealed," added the zealous veteran, "the Countess of Blois where
" St.

“ St. Patrick himself could not find her;
“ and in troth she is a dainty dame, lord
“ Robert—one would not scruple a little
“ danger to serve such a gracious lady.”

The Earl sighed—“ Yes, de Evreux,
“ she *is* a sweet one—But she is the wife
“ of a ” — “ Traitor, why true, he is
“ so ” — “ I did not *say* traitor, Sir Wil-
“ liam ” — “ But he *is* a traitor—Ay, and
“ a usurper too—While de Evreux can
“ wield a sword in our Empress’s cause,
“ well as I esteem the Count as a man, I
“ will fight against him as *her* enemy ” —
“ Words are unnecessary to prove *your*
“ fealty my friend—that is too well esta-
“ blished to need such feeble props—
“ But we must be brief—I will hasten
“ to my sister, though my dependance
“ on her gentleness has no foundation.”
“ Why by my truly,” replied the war-
rior, “ I cannot defend her virtues, al-
“ though I would *die* in the justification
“ of her lawful claims. Earl

Earl Robert would listen no longer to the garrulity of age, and was quitting his visitor, when the approach of several armed men, headed by Lord Fitzjohn, at so early an hour, gave him a momentary surprise, but it settled into the deepest indignation when he understood they were commissioned to arrest his loyal friend for high treason. "My Lord," cried Gloucester, "I will pledge myself for Sir William's appearance—suffer him to retain his liberty till I return—The guards may wait in the anti-chamber, and you will breakfast with de Evreux." "Now by the mass, our lady is right," cried the ancient, "for what can a worn-out soldier perform—one too, who cannot flatter—It is fit for such to give place to the filken fops, whose butterfly wings look more tempting than the steel trappings of a rude unpolished war-man." This blunt obser-

vation was received by Fitzjohn with a frown, while he glanced at his own flame-coloured velvet apparel; and although he dared not refuse a request made by the brother of his sovereign, preserved a sullen silence during that nobleman's absence.

As Maud could not, amidst the wildest excesses of uncontrolled rage, entirely forget the hints of her brother respecting St. Bertha and her colleague, she felt a malignant triumph in the defiance she could then give to any slanderous calumny by producing in safety the object of it; but that triumph felt some diminution, when the Earl frankly accused her of pride, prejudice, and cruelty, in continuing to persecute a creature who was inferior in no instance but what was adventitious to her haughty tormenter; and concluded a very spirited remonstrance, by demanding the liberation

liberation of Sir William, and Stephen's restoration to the apartment she had obliged him to quit.

“ Will it,” he added, “ he thought
“ credible in future ages that a woman
“ — a monarch—one possessed of the
“ most glorious privilege, that of tem-
“ pering justice with mercy—should
“ give ear to private, nay unnatural
“ pique, even to the exclusion of both
“ those attributes—and dare to separate
“ by the most cruel means those who
“ are bound by our church's holy sacra-
“ ments? — And should even this be al-
“ lowed—will they give any degree of
“ credit to the assertion that a gallant
“ warrior—one who had contributed
“ his strength—his blood—his every
“ power of body and mind to the sup-
“ port of that monarch's claim, should,
“ at the close of a long and noble life
“ be condemned by the caprice of her

“ he had so faithfully served, to an ignominious punishment? Ah, Maud
“ —Can it be because he had not out-
“ lived the feelings of humanity? ”

To answer an address so pointed, required a calmer spirit than hers it so effectually irritated—a thousand conflicting passions tore her bosom, but they were all of the most turbulent nature—and when speech was again restored, she made use of it only to confirm the purposes of her determined soul. Gloucester then became almost hopelessly convinced of the loss of his cause, yet one more trial remained—and he departed in sullen anger; while a feeble gleam, which the sudden arrangement of a new scheme shed upon his generous mind, restored in a measure the vigorous tone of that mind.

No

No sooner did Sir William depart from Earl Robert's apartment, (who lamented far more feelingly the disappointment of his benevolent purposes than did the noble veteran) than he proceeded to methodise the plan which he dared to hope might meliorate his sister's hitherto impenetrable heart. To do this it was necessary to combat a remaining shock, which neither time or circumstance could totally annihilate—but which he wisely considered *might* operate when he was less able to endure its violence, as the exigence of the present occasion would obliterate much of the confusion and ceremonies of a first introduction—But when in conformity with his benign intention the lovely and mourning Matilda met him in the presence of Mother Ursula, prioress of the holy asylum Sir William had prepared for her reception, even Gloucester, the rational self-

denying Gloucester, could scarcely support an interview so touching and so grievous.

Matilda saw and pityed his tender confusion—but armed by her fond and faithful attachment to the first and sole possessor of her heart, as well as overwhelmed with sorrow for the situation she had left him in, no improper remembrance of past events deepened the ashy paleness of her cheek—She bowed with a modest and collected gracefulness to Earl Robert, and when he was so far restored to his usual serenity as to explain his motives for this visit, her gratitude was truly engaged—and she wept her thanks in an attitude almost amounting to prostration. This was a scene not to be repeated. The Earl arose—expressed his injunctions respecting her punctuality in the business he meditated, and departed.

Delighted

Delighted with the condescension of a nobleman so universally respected and beloved, the Prioress indulged herself and gratified her amiable visitor in enumerating his various excellencies; and concluded with her astonishment at his remaining so long in a state of celibacy.

A faint tinge passed over Matilda's cheek at this unexpected observation—for most truly could *she* account for his conduct in that particular. Mother Ursula noticed the sudden emotion, and with a curiosity heightened by her long seclusion from the world, enquired “if any reason could be assigned for such a forbearance in a benevolent and powerful Prince?” — “Certainly,” replied the still blushing dame, who was conscious of no culpable inducement that need withhold her from communicating the several events of a blameless life

life to a respectable proteêtress—" And," added she, " as you this morning expressed a wish to be acquainted with my melancholy story, I will endeavour to cheat a milerable hour by giving the outlines of a disastrous fate—In consequence you will be made acquainted with several transactions in which the fortune of that gallant Earl was interwoven with mine."

The Prioress was pleased with her condescension, and listened to a tale, which although sparingly recounted, and not at all exaggerated by a vindictive spirit, was calculated to diminish every reverential consideration in favor of Maud.

When the poor sufferer had touched upon the circumstances previous to Eda's departure from St. Winefred's, she
went

went on to observe, that the mysterious flight of her damsel, although natural enough to one so decided in her hatred to perpetual confinement, was an additional subject of uneasiness to herself. "Indeed," she continued, "I almost suspected the Abbess of some nefarious design, and that by separating us, her orders respecting my unhappy destination might be effected with more ease and secrecy, which doubtless was owing to some new commands from her unjust employer.

"Impressed by the most horrid ideas, I could not help deploring the cruelty of a woman whom I had so innocently disgusted; and my existence soon became burthenfome—Even my evening walks were disregarded—and I would stand for hours at a long narrow window which looked upon a thick grove of prodigious elms, where

“ the bent of my cogitations received
“ no disturbance from outward objects,
“ till one brilliant night my attention
“ was caught by the view of a figure
“ gliding between the trees.

“ That St. Bertha would occasion-
“ ally employ a few leisure minutes in
“ that sequestered recess, I had frequent-
“ ly witnessed ; therefore continued to
“ enjoy the invigorating breeze as it
“ agitated the unpruned honey-suckle
“ that waved about my casement, and
“ revived every torpid faculty—when
“ the sudden appearance of Eda who
“ stood under the window with ex-
“ tended arms as if ready to embrace
“ her poor mistress, gave such a shock
“ to my feelings as threatened to de-
“ stroy her attempt to assist me — and
“ before I could understand the good
“ creature’s half whispering plan for
“ my escape, St. Bertha, *indeed*, pre-
“ sented

“ sented herself at the lower end of the
“ walk. Eda, whom I hastily conjured
“ to depart, exclaimed, “We are ruined,
“ unless you will be punctual”—and then
“ darting among some bushes which
“ grew beneath the window, I saw no
“ more of her.

“ Terrified almost to a degree of
“ madness lest the Abbess should de-
“ tect Eda, for whose escape from an eye
“ that penetrated every possible intri-
“ cacy I had nothing to hope, I was
“ ready to deprecate the wrath such a
“ discovery must incite; and upon St.
“ Bertha’s near approach to the bushes
“ actually gasped with apprehension,
“ while my head, which was bent for-
“ ward to catch the dreaded sounds,
“ reclined against the heavy window
“ frame—But to my excessive surprise
“ the Abbess quietly passed the sus-
“ pected

“pested place, and I beheld no more
“of her.

“Relieved from the horror of an
“immediate discovery, my thoughts
“were now turned upon Eda’s enig-
“matical charge—I was to be *punctual*—
“but to what? — True, she had endea-
“voured to give me hope, as I could
“here and there decypher her words—
“but the true meaning of her hints was
“far beyond my comprehension, and
“I gave up the elucidation as hopeless.

“You may judge, dear mother, of
“the wretched Matilda’s situation on
“that awful night — Bred up in the
“strictest attachment to the professional
“people of our most holy church, and
“detesting every shadow of hypocrisy,
“my feelings were nearly intolerable;
“and the idea of deceiving even those by
“whom

“ whom I had been so causelessly im-
“ mured, gave me infinite pain.

“ The presence of St. Bertha, with
“ whom I had usually passed an hour
“ previous to our retiring for the night,
“ was now to be carefully avoided;
“ and I threw myself on the bed with
“ a resolution not to appear before
“ one, who (from my being under a ne-
“ cessity to impose upon) I considered
“ in part as aggrieved — Yet too much
“ agitated to expect repose, I again
“ arose, and trimming my lamp sat silent
“ and dispirited, foreboding I knew not
“ what, and starting at every noise
“ which could not be immediately ac-
“ counted for. —

“ The whispering steps of several
“ nuns appointed to watch that night
“ before an image of our lady, gave me
“ a momentary hope that my deliver-
“ ance

“ance was at hand—but again, as they
“slowly retreated, I resumed my melancholy employment of listening for
“some more propitious interruption,
“when the sound of my own name, as
“it reached my ear from the adjoining passage, almost petrified every
“reasoning faculty; and I could
“scarcely reach the door to develop
“the cause of such an unusual surprise.

“Eda, for it was *her* voice which had
“alarmed me, no sooner beheld, than
“hastily beckoning to follow, she rather
“flew than walked towards the stairs,
“and impelled, as it were, to pursue—I
“soon found myself in an obscure apartment, lighted only by a small lamp
“which was placed before a crucifix—
“Here I would have stopped, but the
“faithful creature taking my arm, led me
“to a narrow flight of steps that seemed
“to

“to terminate in utter darkness —
“One minute more,” whispered she,
“and you are safe.” — “I trembled, but
“would not resist. The steps were
“broken, which made our descent
“both tedious and dangerous — and
“it was with inexpressible pleasure I
“beheld a glimpse of light, which Eda
“assured me streamed through an aper-
“ture by which we must pass.

“Oh, Madam ! how shall I describe
“the sensations of my heart, when up-
“on quitting the before-mentioned
“aperture, I found it was concealed
“by those very bushes, among which
“Eda had sheltered herself from the
“sight of St. Bertha. Oh ! how delici-
“ously sweet was the breath of the early
“morning as it played upon the fra-
“grant honey-suckles, whose perfume
“had so often delighted my senses —
“I looked up — the flaunting climber
“was

“ was within my reach — I plucked a
“ flower, and was hastening with Eda
“ from the eventful spot, when the
“ matin bell struck us as the knell to
“ our high raised hope — for it was
“ necessary to pass the chapel in our
“ retreat, and the brightening dawn
“ would effectually prevent any con-
“ cealment.

“ In this cruel exigence the appear-
“ ance of a man approaching towards
“ us seemed to complete my anguish —
“ I ran, but without any idea of escape ;
“ and had reached the extremity of the
“ wilderness, when my senses suddenly
“ failed, owing (as I have imagined)
“ to the dread of being carried back
“ to my prison.

“ It was some time before I revived
“ sufficiently enough to dispel the faith-
“ ful Eda's terrors — nor then could I
“ comprehend

“comprehend the reality of my situation, till looking wildly upon the rocky bare walls and rugged flooring of the dismal recess to which I had been conveyed, a horrid suspicion darted upon my mind—and the punishment allotted to incontinency I appropriated to my present case — “Yes, I cried, turning my streaming eyes to a mutilated magdalen, *thou* must in future be a memento to the wretched Matilda — Now indeed my indignant enemy may rest content — Too fast has she woven her dreadful snares for her simple prey to escape the toils of a base woman.” “Oh patience my dearest mistress,” cried Eda, “your senses are disordered” — “Ah, would they were—but here is no redress, no deception—The light of heaven will soon be denied us. Poor faithful follower of thy ruined lady’s fortunes, thou too must suffer for thy incautious

“ incautious reflections and unprop-
“ tious flight.”

“ While the agonies of my oppressed
“ heart were thus poured out, I cast a
“ mournful eye towards Eda — when,
“ oh, heavens! I caught the glimpse of a
“ man as he stood gazing on me be-
“ hind my tender supporter, on whose
“ knees I reclined my distracted head —
“ See, cried I, starting up and again
“ sinking through weakness — See in
“ that murderous — But God of won-
“ ders — I was going to add — *aspect* —
“ when a voice, sweeter than the me-
“ lody of angels, enforced my atten-
“ tion, and I once more raised my asto-
“ nished eye, which rested upon the
“ empassioned countenance of Stephen,
“ my betrothed — my first — my last —
“ my only love.

“ Here

“ Here madam I should fail in every
“ attempt to depict the effect of such a
“ meeting, and under such circum-
“ stances. “ I would have spoken,
“ said the adored of my heart, when
“ the tumult of extacy was somewhat
“ abated—I would have spoken sooner,
“ but I dreaded the consequence to
“ your harrassed spirit, and have anx-
“ iously waited for an opportunity from
“ the moment you were brought to this
“ place ” — “ *This* place, I repeated,
“ while my mind renewed its former
“ horrors — and are *you* too brought
“ here to die ” — “ *Die*, cried Eda—
“ No, lady, nor us neither—we are yet
“ in St. Winefred’s clutches, but I trust
“ by night we shall be out of her power.”
“ Nothing of all this could I compre-
“ hend, till Eda proceeded to say,
“ that the man whose appearance had
“ so terrified me was the Count of Blois,
“ whom she had providentially met at
“ Countess

“ Countess Shrewsbury’s, to whose seat
“ on her lucky escape from St. Wine-
“ fred’s she directly repaired ; and that
“ he rested not till she returned with
“ him to the Abbey, for the purpose of
“ attempting my emancipation.—“ Lit-
“ tle did I imagine, interrupted the
“ Count, that Eda had not informed
“ you I was so near — and when you
“ sunk helpless and insensible from my
“ clasping arms, I forgot in that pre-
“ cious moment ” —— “ But holy Mo-
“ ther you cannot pardon the egotism
“ of a feeble worldling — I will there-
“ fore be brief as to what remains of
“ my little history ” —— “ But I *can*,
“ replied Ursula, not only pardon but
“ applaud that tenderness, which di-
“ rected to a holy vocation I should
“ have revered.” Matilda was grati-
fied by this candid confession, and
went on to say, “ that apprehensive of a
“ discovery, Stephen had conveyed her
“ to

“ to the cave they were in, which from
“ its dampness and distance from the
“ house, was entirely unfrequented, and
“ that they watched impatiently for the
“ vesper-bell — as during the evening
“ service there would be a possibility of
“ passing the chapel windows without
“ observation.

“ It is certain,” proceeded Matilda,
“ that in our present situation the want
“ of seasonable refreshments was not
“ considered as an evil—since terror,
“ suspense, and may I say a dignified
“ affection supplied to us all the de-
“ mands of nature. To *me* indeed
“ every evil seemed light, contrasted
“ with that of being totally excluded
“ from the society of my fellow crea-
“ tures, and suffered to linger out
“ a miserable existence, where no pity-
“ ing eye would be permitted to shed
“ a ray of consolation upon my dark-
“ ened

“ ened prospects, and where famine
“ itself is accompanied with every bit-
“ ter aggravation — The presence too
“ of a protecting friend inspired me
“ with a joyful resolution which no ex-
“ pectation of detention could appal ;
“ and I beheld the glooms of night as
“ they fell around us as the harbingers
“ of peace and freedom.

“ Silent then, and listening with a
“ strengthening hope to the clock which
“ told the passing hour, we endeavoured
“ to annihilate the intervening time ;
“ but when the bell struck out I trem-
“ bled with apprehension ” — “ The
“ chapel is quite illuminated,” cried
“ Eda, who had ventured to the en-
“ trance of our asylum. She had
“ scarcely spoken, when those sublime
“ strains which are calculated to rouse
“ the most feeble devotion, convinced
“ us we might depart in safety, and to
“ which

“ which my palpitating heart responded
“ as we passed under the sacred walls.

“ Oh, lady ! how inexpressible were
“ those feelings (which while confined
“ in the gloomy cave I treated as vi-
“ sionary) that agitated my heart as we
“ again re-entered the dark recess
“ among the bushes, and hardly dared
“ to breathe, while following Eda who
“ passed her hand over the wall as she
“ crept along to find the door of liberty
“ — for to reascend the steps would have
“ been the road to certain discovery” —
“ Now then,” cried the eager damsel,
“ we are safe,” as the door yielded to
“ her hand—and the next moment we
“ regained the open air : I then found
“ that we were at the northern end of
“ the Abbey, to which this entrance
“ was the only one on that side ; and as
“ I was afterwards informed, Eda, in
“ her former rambles about the inter-
“ nal

“nal part of the edifice, perceiving
“this door attempted to open it, which
“she did with infinite difficulty. That
“delighted with the hope of effecting
“my deliverance, she was hurrying
“back to inform me of her success,
“but hearing what she supposed to
“be a person descending the steps,
“she rushed out, and the door falling
“too the terrified girl had no resource
“but to hasten from a scene of such
“danger. It then occurred to her
“that lady Shrewsbury, if acquainted
“with my situation, might be autho-
“rised to demand me of St Bertha, and
“the event, although not managed
“exactly as she wished, proved very
“grateful to her worthy heart. I
“shall now only add, that conducted
“by my beloved consort, we soon
“reached a small house where the be-
“nevolent Countess waited to receive
“me—and to that excellent woman’s
“remon-

“ remonstrances Stephen yielded his de-
“ fire of a laudable retaliation ; nay even
“ when we returned to Normandy, con-
“ sented to conceal my origin till the de-
“ signs he then conceived should render
“ a discovery necessary.”

“ You are aware,” argued lady Shrews-
“ bury, “ of that vindictive spirit, by
“ which you have jointly endured so
“ much—You likewise are assured of her
“ suspicions respecting the fate of that
“ Crown she pants to possess — At pre-
“ sent, any attempt on your part to ex-
“ pose or punish her treachery, will meet
“ with a vigorous resistance from her in-
“ fatuated father, and the mischief may
“ redound on yourselves. Wait then
“ with patience, till the period shall ar-
“ rive when you may honorably contend
“ for the rights of sovereignty—I *know*
“ the difficulty attending a reservation of
“ this nature — but what is at all possible,
VOL. II. C “ may,

“ may, by discreet and persevering management be rendered practicable.”

“ Convinced of the advantages such a plan might produce, my husband not only granted an implicit consent to it, but promised to engage our foreign friends in the same cause, which he afterwards fully effected; and when this invaluable friend had witnessed our marriage at her own seat, she accompanied us to Normandy, where my happiness met with no interruption, till Henry’s death disturbed the sweet repose of my life; and Stephen hurried over to England, leaving his poor Matilda to follow when the succession should be permanently secured.

“ Alas, madam, how different from the intelligence my soul panted to receive was that which on our landing met

“ met my ear! Maud triumphant —
“ Stephen in chains—and the good, the
“ benign lady Shrewsbury, who had long
“ since returned to her peaceful resi-
“ dence, deceased. No friend to receive
“ a forlorn lady—No comfortable asylum
“ to shelter a poor harrassed creature —
“ Uncertain where to seek my husband,
“ and dreading to encounter the basilisk
“ whose glance portended destruction,
“ what a fate was mine — And when I
“ stopped at Canterbury, my very soul
“ sickened at the information that the
“ deposed monarch was to be sent to
“ Winchester to receive his doom from
“ his haughty foe.

“ The length of the journey, and the
“ inconvenience of bad roads, were seri-
“ ous impediments to my intention of
“ visiting the dear captive; and even
“ my faithful friend and constant com-

“panion Eda, had no consolation to give
“me on this head — But while we were
“jointly lamenting such accumulated
“calamities, a noble Knight craved ad-
“mittance ; and before I could restrain
“the impetuous Eda, she introduced
“a man of a martial yet benign appear-
“ance — whose business I soon learned
“was to conduct me in safety to Win-
“chester.

“Thankful for the unexpected fa-
“vor, I accepted his offer of a wain,
“which would contain me and my bag-
“gage — and the next morning left
“Canterbury, accompanied by the
“Knight and several soldiers who were
“evidently appointed (but by whom
“I could not learn) to protect and
“provide for us through the whole
“journey.”

Lady

Lady Matilda then concluded with a repetition of the events succeeding her arrival; and left upon Mother Ursula's mind the most unfavorable impression respecting Maud's principles, manners, disposition and temper.



CHAP. III.

THE buoyant hope which Earl Robert's scheme respecting a final attempt to soften his sister's resentment created, was not suffered to languish through neglect; and the evening succeeding his visit to Matilda was appointed to this important purpose.

Conscious of some little failure in his usual manners at the conclusion of their last interview, and sensible that the point he wished to carry was of a nature inimical

cal to any furious expression of anger, however justly roused, he re-assumed that softness so natural to his disposition, and greeted the Empress with all that tenderness his heart had long encouraged for her.

Surprised, and evidently pleased by his returning kindness, Maud met the noble Gloucester with a placidity nearly resembling his own—and conferred upon her political concerns in a way which seemed to ensure to her generous brother a prospect of success. Following therefore her lead, he entered into a statement of her present intentions, and congratulated her on the security of her present establishment.

“Queen of England,” he cried, “and
“sovereign of innumerable hearts, now is
“Maud *indeed* herself—placed on the
“basis of her subjects veneration, and her

“ own undoubted claims—What power
“ can shake a rock so firm? Depend, then
“ my sister, on those, who for your sake,
“ and that of the young Plantagenet
“ would fight—would bleed—would
“ die! Look round the entire horizon
“ of your hopes, and see if *one* cloud re-
“ mains to fully its bright beams? No!
“ All is clear, decided, and indisputable.
“ To Gloucester, then, submit the ma-
“ nagement of those events which female
“ strength is incompetent to govern.
“ The welfare of a monarch must be in-
“ volved with that of her people, and
“ both shall ever be consulted by Ro-
“ bert of Gloucester—With no ties upon
“ him (excepting a fraternal one) but
“ those of the public weal — that weal
“ shall be secured through a thousand
“ sources; and may he perish when
“ *self*-independant of others happiness,
“ shall lead him from the point he has
“ ever kept in view.”

“ My

“ My brother,” cried the Empress, who had forgotten in the fullness of her heart how much of this apostrophe was intended as an oblique attack on her own propensities—“ My brother, your professions are but the heralds of your noble actions — To you I trust the honor and safety of a Sovereign and her people. Guided—guarded, and supported by you, England shall yet see felicitous days. One — only one reservation I would mention as the privilege of royalty — a negative or affirmative in cases of life or death — A privilege which all my predecessors have enjoyed in its fullest extent, and without which, the power of princes must be incomplete” — And now observing Earl Robert’s countenance assuming a serious cast, (for instigated by certain reasons he could by no means give entire latitude to her last condition) she reverted to another subject; nor made

the smallest objection of accompanying him to those parts of the castle that were in want of immediate repair.

This was an important point gained, and he directly led her to several half ruined ground chambers, contiguous to that which Stephen had previously occupied. Maud trembled and sighed as she hastily passed the scene of her recent disappointment — and complaining of fatigue would have returned to her closet—saying, she could safely leave the adjustment of those matters to him who was so well able to judge of their importance.

Gloucester, who had thrown open the room under a pretence of examining its defects, entreated her to accompany him to a range of apartments beneath *that* he was in, and directly crossed over to the entrance by which Maud had been formerly

merly admitted—but to this request she opposed a positive denial ; till the Earl stopping, and gazing with a grave and penetrating look on her half-averted face, recalled her to a sense of the impropriety she was betraying ; and with a faint and watery smile, the wretched Empress, made wretched at that cruel moment by the variety of contending passions, ridiculed herself for encouraging such evident reluctance to explore the damp recesses which descended to the foundation. “ But indeed,” she added, “ I do not see the necessity of examining places too horrid even for the abodes of guilt”—“ And yet my sister they *have* been appropriated solely to the purpose of receiving the most atrocious criminals — Perhaps even *now*,” and he shuddered at the suggestion,—“ some sad object of feudal tyranny may be languishing away a life of pining grief. Let *us* then begin our pro-

“ posed researches into long indulged
“ abuses, by penetrating the dark and
“ dismal habitations once devoted to
“ scenes of suffering.”

To resist any longer would have implied a stronger motive for her reluctance than prudence could authorize; and Maud presented a cold and half repulsing hand to the Earl, permitting him to lead her to the extremity of a descent she could not survey without manifest terror. When the necessity of a light occurring to Earl Robert, he hastily returned to procure a lamp, and left the Empress to her own painful even distressing cogitations, which his quick re-appearance dispersed; and no other obstacle remaining, he cautiously stepped forwards, at the same time endeavouring to re-assure his sister's spirits with the hope of restoring some helpless creature to the blessings of warmth and liberty. But
Maud's

Maud's feelings were not so disinterestedly engaged as to find any gratification in the idea of contributing to the relief of one from whom no return could be expected—and with a heart awfully impressed by the surrounding glooms she sullenly proceeded, nor made any answer to Gloucester's observations upon the long and narrow loop-holes (constructed for the admission of air) which he resolved to enlarge; and without noticing her silence directed her attention to the mouldring pillars that supported the ceiling of the passage they were in.

While Maud with a fearful and restrained step measured the gloomy path along which they slowly advanced, she was desired by Gloucester to stop a moment at the door of a recess, from whence she could plainly distinguish the sound of human voices. "Here then," exclaimed the Earl, "we shall be able to ascertain
or

“or refute the suspicion I have encouraged.” Maud caught his arm, and besought him to consider the consequences of such an intrusion. “*You,*” cried she, in a desultory voice, “expect to restore some prisoner to his long lost liberty — But are you *sure* these cells contain not some disaffected citizens who will retaliate upon us the indignities they fancy *we* have caused?” Robert listened not to an observation so characteristic of his sister’s sentiments — but taking from his pocket several rusty keys applied one to the lock, which directly gave way to his strenuous endeavours; and the clank of chains that now saluted their ears was a ready contradiction to Maud’s selfish supposition.

With a composed and solemn aspect, Earl Robert turning to the Empress and pointing towards the scene that met her horror-struck eyes, asked, “If the sufferings

“ferings she then beheld were not adequate to their cause? Yonder,” he cried, “extended on a damp and miserable mattress lies him, who for a season swayed the English sceptre. Beside that *fettered shadow* of royalty kneels”—Here his acquired fortitude forsook him—the noble Gloucester was unmanned. “Oh, my sister!” he continued, eagerly grasping her hand and aiming to draw her nearer to the wretched pair—“Can you behold—Say—can you bear to see a once valued friend so cruelly tortured? See—there kneels the sweet, the suffering Matilda! I do not—I would not say this has been effected by *your* order—but *your* order *can* reverse the horrid picture. You can restore at least to his former”—“Oh, cease, thou most revered of human beings!” cried Matilda, rising from her knees—and again prostrating herself before the Empress—“To me—
“To

“ To me belongs the task of pleading
“ for my captured lord. Ah, madam !
“ Can you behold these mouldy walls—
“ this humid earth—yon wretched mat-
“ tress—and calmly say, such be the re-
“ ward of usurpation ? If he has of-
“ fended beyond forgiveness, it was a
“ noble fault—Let then his punishment
“ be suitable. The meanest criminal—
“ the most abandoned this realm con-
“ tains, enjoys the comfort of knowing
“ his confinement is deserved, and that
“ it is but adequate to his crimes — But
“ here — Oh, sovereign lady — behold
“ those chains ! That miserable garb
“ allotted to one whose descent equals
“ your own ! And if your mercy can-
“ not pardon, let justice, decency, and
“ humanity alleviate the miseries he
“ endures.”

The suddenness of this surprise which
Gloucester had previously arranged, and

to

to aid the effects of which he had soothed and encouraged the rigid Empress into such an unexpected attack upon her passions, added to a little consciousness of her own duplicity, so far overcame the spirit of recrimination that she stood nearly motionless during the gentle creature's affecting pleas—who gathering from her looks, her silence, and her attitude, that she might venture to repeat her intercessions, respectively caught the hand that was next her, and pressing it to her agonizing bosom while tears of bitter grief rolled over her pale cheek, again renewed her pathetic entreaties.

“Would Maud, in mercy to a helpless woman,” cried the eager petitioner, “but liberate my beloved. Oh, Empress, avert not thine eye! — Let one gracious beam of pity soften these angry glances, and dispense that pardon which shall not be abused.” “Never!”
denounced

denounced the cruel judge. "Serpent,
" begone—nor contaminate me with thy
" polluted touch." So saying, she shook
the unhappy lady from her with a vio-
lence so unexpected as to level her with
the ground. Enraged at this unfeminine
action, Earl Gloucester raised Matilda
with a tenderness not more hateful to his
sister than consolatory to the afflicted Ste-
phen, who could only express his concern
by sighs, groans, and inarticulate entrea-
ties for mercy to his wife.

"I see," resumed the furious Em-
press, "I clearly perceive the detesta-
" ble coalition between a traitor, and him
" who should defend the rights he ex-
" poses to destruction — Say, Glou-
" cester—didst thou not, with a craft dis-
" honorable to thy principles, contrive
" this meeting? And thinkest thou to
" overcome my just resentment by such
" puny arts? No — I tell thee, mean
" dastardly

“ dastardly abettor of usurping treason,
“ that while life informs this beating bo-
“ som, Maud will be the protector of her
“ own exclusive claims.”—“ At least
“ madam,” said the disappointed Earl,
“ you will condescend to remove your
“ victims from a cell, *too horrid for the*
“ *abode of guilt.*”

Maud, who in the repetition of her own words fully understood the implicated sarcasm, turned in fullen disdain from a brother whose power, abilities and disposition, if exerted in her behalf, were equal to a host of armed men—and whose temper, though so often tried, had been proof against so many provocations. But important as his services were, and much as she generally estimated those services, while directed solely to *her* advantage, she could not endure to see them in any degree devoted to an enemy—And exasperated almost to a state of frenzy

frenzy, she defied the consequence of her uncontrolled passions.

Earl Robert who beheld in her working features the defeat of his benevolent hopes, and certain of her resolution to persecute the unfortunate Stephen, now only contended for the poor prisoner's removal into a more comfortable apartment — "Unless," added he, with smothered indignation, "this cruel situation "has been appropriated to the purpose "of a beginning punishment." "By "me," repeated she, turning an eye that gleamed with revenge upon the two objects of her inveteracy; (for overcome with a complication of grief, the poor Matilda was reclining upon a bosom that throbbed in union with her own, while she fixed a look so piteous, so imploring, so expressive upon Maud as would have touched every heart but hers)—"Yes," went on this callous woman—"I sent
" him

“ him hither — *I* plunged him into the
“ confines of darkness — *My* injuries cal-
“ led for the justice of retribution ; and
“ *here*, till the sentence is executed which
“ such crimes demand, he *shall* remain.
“ For *you*,” addressing her detested rival,
who was again crawling to her feet to
deprecate the inhuman decree — “ For
“ *you*, whose injustice to the mistaken
“ Gloucester, deserves my utmost hatred,
“ no plea of forbearance can operate —
“ But as in *his* liberty lies your hope of
“ future happiness, the deprivation of it
“ will possibly form your greatest punish-
“ ment — Go then, and mourn over your
“ admired Eustace, the disappointment
“ of his father’s schemes.” “ Ah, Eu-
“ stace ! ” repeated Matilda — “ Did
“ you mention the heir of my beloved —
“ Say, what of him — Must *he* too die !
“ Where is he ? ” — and then shrieking
from the acuteness of her feelings —
“ Bring me my child — Here in this
“ deep

“ deep and dreary dungeon, I will hide
“ him from your wrath — Yon bed of
“ sorrow will contain us all. No — No
“ Crowns for us — The thorns they cover
“ are too sharp ; they pierce my heart.
“ See, lady ! ” uncovering her snowy
bosom, and then hastily closing her robe
and looking at Gloucester — “ But *you*
“ will extract them — for I did not abuse
“ your confidence — Stephen was my first
“ love. There — There he lies — Can—
“ not *you* dissolve a flinty heart — a heart
“ that never melted for another’s woe —
“ (you know whose I mean) — It is a very
“ hard one — It condemned the poor Ma—
“ tilda, but I forgive her — Dont tell —
“ dont tell, it may make her angry — and
“ indeed I would not hurt her for the
“ universe. ” “ And can you bear these
“ effusions of a frenzy yourself have oc—
“ casioned and with-hold its cure ? ”
asked the Earl, while the unchecked
tears almost intercepted speech — “ Ty—
“ gress, ”

“ gress,” continued he, observing the
Empress remained inexorable—“ From
“ this moment I abjure your cause—Gen-
“ tle and merciful, had Stephen’s case
“ been yours *he* would have softened it
“ by numberless attentions. Adieu,
“ then, Madam — Enjoy your boasted
“ privileges — Triumph in the exercise
“ of a power that will render you hateful
“ to the present and future generations ;
“ but remember that the very means you
“ take to establish your throne, will shake
“ its deepest foundation. From me you
“ have nothing to fear—*I* cannot be un-
“ just—But, when engaged in the ser-
“ vice of some foreign potentate the fall
“ of England’s tyrant shall reach my ear,
“ how will the circumstances that pro-
“ duced it temper the fraternal regret of
“ a still sympathising brother. Stephen,
“ farewell ! And you, sweet victim of re-
“ morseless cruelty, adieu. I cannot
“ mourn the loss of that reason which
“ has

“has been so repeatedly attacked from
“the same quarter. To say I wish the
“restoration of your former power,”
(again addressing the captured Stephen)
“would be contrary to the pure and
“loyal sentiments of an uncorrupted
“heart—which, however it may revolt
“against the misdemeanors of a lawful
“sovereign, can never encourage a
“thought derogatory to her hereditary
“acquisitions; for although I am not
“permitted to be an actual friend, she
“will never hear of me as a foe to her
“pretensions.”

The warm and energetic address of
Earl Robert to Stephen and his con-
sort—The accompaniment of tears and
sighs, with the calm and steady disdain
his concluding words conveyed, shook
with irresistible violence the resolution
of his sister; for it struck at her predom-
inant passions—it roused every prin-
ciple

ciple of her soul which self-love commanded, and even menaced the annihilation of her ambitious views—But to relent as if merely overcome by selfish consideration would be to establish the character she wished to avoid. Maud, with a seeming inattention to her brother's emotion, settled a commiserating look upon Matilda, who, during her kind protector's speech had seated herself at the feet of the Empress, while her wild and vacant eyes were turned towards the object of her distress, when the desultory glances, as they shifted to different points, at last fixed on the changing countenance of her persecutor.

It then required but little management to place to the account of pity that conduct Maud chose to adopt—for a tear absolutely forced its way as she contemplated the sad consequence of

VOL. II. D her

her barbarity. Gloucester, on whom nothing was lost that encouraged a revival of his almost forgotten scheme, saw with a pleasure he could scarcely conceal, the messenger of gentle tidings as it stole along the flushing cheek; and going up to Stephen, whispered his hope of a happy termination to this painful scene—and then waited in ardent suspense the but half-dreaded event.

“ You are too much disturbed, lady Matilda,” cried the Empress, pressing the hand she had so violently rejected—
“ This melancholy scene has depressed
“ your spirits, and awakened feelings
“ too powerful for restraint. If the re-
“ moval of your husband to a better
“ apartment is necessary to *your* com-
“ fort, I consent in consideration of the
“ terror *you* express (but upon no other
“ account) that you may attend him in
“ the

“ the ground chamber from whence he
“ was taken.”

Pleased as Stephen and the generous Earl might be at this limited concession, its effects were lost upon Matilda; who gazing upon a countenance so lately flaming with rage, (now artfully softened to the tenderness of sympathy) seemed as if endeavouring to trace the meaning of an address she could not understand; when a sudden gleam of recollection darting upon her deranged mind, she snatched her hand away as if abhorrent of the touch, and fearfully retreating, uttered a shriek so terrifying, so wild, and so expressive of her dread of Maud, as shot to the inmost soul of the conscious woman.

“ Our presence,” observed the tender yet prudent Gloucester, “ serves
“ but to disturb this unhappy lady—We
D 2 “ will

“ will leave her to partake of the sweet
“ blandishments of conjugal affection—
“ which I trust will restore, in some
“ degree, those intellects such ill-timed
“ rigor has so forcibly shaken. My
“ lord,” added he, turning to Stephen,
whose tears were bedewing the lovely
yet vacant features of his frenzied
wife—“ we will send the faithful Eda
“ to her mistress, and it shall be *my*
“ care to see you more comfortably
“ situated.” A hopeless sigh, and fresh-
streaming tears, evinced the unfortu-
nate prisoner’s sense of his disconsolate
state; and bowing in mournful silence,
he beheld the departure of this staunch
advocate with an additional pang.

Although a momentary regret for
the mischief she had occasioned, mixed
with the scarcely controllable effects of
an adherence to despotism, Maud was
determined not to recede one tittle from
the

the plan she had formed respecting her enemy's final destination—and to prove to the Earl (if that *could* be proved) that in her severity to Stephen, she was guided only by patriotic justice, and a wish to secure the enjoyment of the crown and its future succession, she gave orders for the liberation of Sir William de Evreux, with that of many others who were supposed to lean to the adverse cause.

Cheered by a concession so opposite to what her conduct both in words and actions had given him reason to expect, Earl Robert resumed his usual gentle demeanour towards her, and introduced the gallant Sir William to kiss her hand, as a token of renewed amity—but when, with a freedom and courage worthy of that intrepid spirit, the good old knight hinted his hopes “that
“ Maud would extend her grace to the

"*chief* offender," a scowling brow, an averted look, and a rejecting motion, proved his mistake—while indignant at the offence, she was ready to accuse him of a presumptuous boldness, in making the moment of his own forgiveness a time to plead for the pardon of another's crimes.

The blundering honesty of Sir William could form no idea of an impropriety which even Gloucester condemned as ill-timed, and he bluntly confessed, "that the favour of his own
"release lost much of its value from
"the restrictions which attended it." But when he found himself deputed to his former post of watching Stephen, he found so much to admire in his sovereign's generous confidence as to attach him still more resolutely to her interest, little imagining of how much consequence to a selfish mind is that
uncorrupted

uncorrupted integrity it would avail itself of, and which, in another, is so indispensable to its own artful schemes; for conscious of that gallant probity which had supported her predecessor's rights, the Empress, in her hasty condemnation of Sir William, adverted only to the gratification of her arbitrary principle, nor once supposed the man, who, through a long course of years had never deviated from the grand and ruling sentiment that swayed a loyal heart, could countenance, even for a moment, the practices of an usurper.

Prepared as de Evreux might be to meet the shock that awaited him in Stephen's apartment, the appearance of his gentle favourite, as she sat totally inattentive to her husband's tender and ineffectual attempts to rouse her from the stupor of insanity, exceeded even

the description Gloucester had given of her situation; and when he courteously addressed her as a familiar friend, the wild and terrific glance she threw over his features overpowered his manly resolution, and the furrows of his benevolent visage received a shower of honest tears.

Matilda, as if assisted by a transient remembrance of the past, seemed to lose the dread of Sir William's presence, in pity for his emotion—and hesitating, as if doubtful of a mistake, asked him “if *he* too had lost his love—and “did the Empress tear her from your arms?” asked the wandering lady—“But, oh, heavenly powers!—Is that—“Is that Sir William de Evreux?—“Ah, yes it is!—Say then, where is my “husband?—Is he yet in the cold “damp dungeon?—Cruel Maud—*She* “tore me from him—*She* loaded him
“with

“ with irons—*She* plunged him beyond
“ the reach of humanity.”—“ Not so, my
“ worshipped wife, your Stephen lives
“ to adore this matchless goodness—
“ look up best beloved of my heart—
“ the Empress relents—no deep damp
“ dungeon contains us now—we have
“ now light, air, and warmth to cheer
“ us.” This fond empaffioned address did not wholly lose its end—Matilda, who for many preceding hours had neither noticed her weeping companion, or the change of their apartment, suddenly turned her eye upon the Count, and speaking in a low, perplexed, and inward tone, whispered—
“ It should be him—true, I saw him
“ fettered—sinking—nay, dying in that
“ horrible abode”—But looking round with the air of a person who aims to recognise some long lost objects—
“ here the dreadful vision ceases; and
“ *here,*” hastily clasping her arms round

the distressed Stephen, "*here*, can be
" no deception—yet—yet, these irons,
" what *can* they portend but sorrow,
" disgrace, and death?"—A violent
burst of anguish now indicated the re-
storation of her enfeebled powers, which
Sir William and his friend, well un-
derstanding its efficacy, sought not to
check, while they imagined a free in-
dulgence of her tears might be of use
to her recovering intellects. Still she
wept with a bitterness that reached the
heart of her participating consort, while
every link of his galling chains was
sanctified by the precious drops of con-
jugal love, till de Evreux, perceiving
the real bent of her affecting grief, and
sensible that his power extended not to
the removal of these cruel manacles,
sought, if possible, to turn her attention
to another subject; "now, by my holi-
" dame," observed he, "the Lady Ma-
" tilda has forgotten her ancient friend-
" ship,

“ ship, it was but yesterday that my life
“ was not worth an hour’s purchase,
“ now, thanks to our gracious sove-
“ reign ! it bears as high a price as one
“ so near its conclusion may hope for ;
“ yet, if I can meet with no kind feli-
“ citations from those I love, it matters
“ but little whether I had died by the
“ battle-axe, broad-sword, or a natural
“ decay.”

The reception this well-timed re-
proof met with, proved Sir William’s
knowledge of the workings of a ge-
nerous spirit. Matilda felt its force ;
and extending her hand towards her
husband’s fetters, with a look which
indicated ingenuous self-reproach—
“ These,” she cried, “ must be an apo-
“ logy for the neglect you complain of
“ —Alas, my burning brain can retain
“ no other image than this devoted
“ object of inhuman fury presents—

“yes, Sir William—I feel—I know—
“I hourly expect the dissolution of a
“tie which hitherto has formed to me
“the whole of earthly felicity. Yet,
“when the sum of all human hopes and
“fears—the gratification of ambition,
“jealousy, and revenge, shall be so-
“lemnly audited, and their accounts
“balanced—oh, vindictive Maud, who
“will appear in thy defence, and how
“can’st thou avoid the condemnation
“even of thine own accusing consci-
“ence!—Tremendous thought!—I see
“her now!—I behold her!”—

“Cease, my Matilda,” cried the a-
larmed Stephen, who perceived in this
sudden transition fresh proof of a dis-
ordered intellect—“you are fatigued
“—Eda will accompany you to a com-
“fortable chamber, where our best be-
“nefactor has ordered every accom-
“modation

“modation that can render it desirable.”

Eda now advanced, and her harassed mistress welcomed her with a mournful smile; and then, turning to de Evreux, whose withered hand she pressed to her throbbing bosom, conjured him to be mindful of his poor prisoner, and particularly to protect him from his mortal enemy. Stephen, who well understood the sentiment which dictated this charge, tenderly embraced her, and endeavoured, when she was departed, to avail himself of Sir William's attempts to cheer him with a hope of deliverance.

CHAP.



CHAP. IV.

IF Maud, through the effects of a policy too profound for a generous mind to fathom, had adopted a mode of treatment respecting her enemy's confinement, more moderate than the ebullition of unrestrained passion at first admitted, it was more owing to the cold prudence of after-thought than any meritorious exertion. Possessed, in every point, of an unlimited possession of his destiny, she remitted some of that anxiety which had mixed with
with

with far different concerns, and began to felicitate herself on the abundant influence she possessed over her numerous adherents, while she gloried in the completion of those measures which promised to be so productive of her own security.

Nothing therefore now remained to check her ardent ambition in its utmost plenitude—Geoffry had left her to the enjoyment of a crown—Earl Gloucester was at hand to assist, advise, and credit, by his relationship to the Empress, the arrangements she might make in a kingdom unused to female sway. Thus raised to the summit of her proudest expectations, the natural bias of her turbulent and haughty disposition soon became a call upon her brother's patience and fortitude, rendering abortive by her impolitic selfishness, the noble, yet just and moderate

derate schemes Robert was continually forming to secure the happiness and loyalty of a people who could not yet forget their former liberty, while the curfew-bell, among other Norman impositions, reminded them of their forced subjection; and the wisest dispositions he arranged for his sister's security and the nation's welfare were commonly set aside as useless or pernicious, by being either controverted in their effects, or setting the opposition of Maud in a light that exposed her true character.

That the conduct of his sister could not, in any point, be deemed impeachable, Earl Robert found sufficient motives for believing; and conceived more chagrin than disappointment at the miscarriage of his well-constructed plans—till stung by that ingratitude which he feared no circumstances could alter, and secretly lamenting the
imbecility

imbecility of a heart that still vibrated to the touch of mortified affections, he suddenly resigned the noble trust so ineffectually improved, and would wander for hours about the environs of Winchester, heedless of that welfare he had so ardently supported.

While the enemy of Stephen was thus openly exulting in the accomplishment of her most sanguine wishes, and contemplating with a triumphant security the bright horizon of her brilliant prospect, she adverted not to the lowering mischief which threatened to envelope its radiance—nor once conceived that her competitor, confined, enchained, and permitted to see no one but Matilda and de Evreux, could launch from the recesses of his prison a dart powerful enough to strike at the gaudy summit she had gained—or that her impolitic behaviour would only
serve

serve to strengthen the aversion a generous people encouraged against arbitrary measures; more particularly as she had, through the restlessness of jealousy, removed the unfortunate Blois to London, under the idea that he would be more strictly secured— And weary of the farce which policy taught her to practise in the indulgence so recently shewn to Matilda, she availed herself of some futile pretence to separate the affectionate pair, and loaded Stephen with heavier chains and new indignities.

Thus provided as it were against every possible contingency, and left by the brother whose counsel she neglected, and whose kindness she abused, Maud gave the full reins to her will and vainly-fancied despotism for legal government, and the haughtiness of an illiberal mind for true greatness.

Accustomed

Accustomed now to the exercise of unbounded power, it became her custom to condemn, acquit, or determine causes as the temper of the moment should influence her judgment; and this business was generally prefaced by the din of those who in ruder times were more deficient in the silent respect of later days, and the Empress betrayed no symptoms of fear, when, on a morning set apart for the distribution of partial decisions, as she was looking from her closet to the court, where the lower description of people were accustomed to wait, she beheld a greater number than usual clamouring for admittance; but as the noise increased, she sternly commanded her attendants to enquire into the cause, bidding them to threaten the delinquents with her royal displeasure.

Scarcely

Scarcely were these orders issued, when her steady adherent, Brian Fitz-Milo, a powerful baron, burst into her apartment with a look of horror, and informed her that the Bishop of Winchester had encouraged the populace to rise in favor of Stephen, and had even engaged a part of the military in the same cause, concluding with the necessity there was for her immediate departure,

Maud, whose disbelief of such an astonishing procedure needed all the strength of Milo's energy to controvert, would have questioned the truth of this assertion, but the prelate's appearance at the castle-gates, surrounded by bow-men, heavy-armed cavalry, and spear-men, soon changed the current of her ideas, and accompanied by the warlike Brian, she gained a small closet over the guard-room, where he
advised

advised her to remain till the confusion was abated.

Here she continued a prey to justly-excited fears, when, finding Fitz-Milo did not return, and that the guard-room itself was attacked, a sort of despair animated her to the most desperate resolution, and descending the steps she soon found herself in the midst of a confusion which seemed to indicate every indubitable sign of an insurrection.

To her hasty demands for Earl Gloucester none condescended to reply; and Maud immediately, from the surrounding circumstances, concluded her fate to be inevitable, while with a calm, yet majestic deportment, she passed by the guard, who, to a man, respected that sovereign they were destined to oppose.

Amazed

Amazed at the submission of those rugged warriors, from whom she expected various indignities—and somewhat recovered from the horror of a scene so unexpected, the abdicated monarch passed through a city devoted to partial destruction, with a fortitude astonishing even to herself, and happily discovered the injured protector of her rights in the manner already described.

To the partial detail which Maud presented for Lady de Warrene's approving concurrence, she gave an attention too discriminating for the benefit her friend, at its opening, had sought to derive from it; and, although unacquainted, for reasons already mentioned, with many of the circumstances we have elucidated, saw enough to condemn in a conduct which friendship and respect so heartily wished to acquit

acquit ; and when pressed to give her free and candid opinion of the unequivocal resentment the Empress still retained against her opponents, frankly, though modestly, declared against a resentment as irreligious, and beneath the dignity of a noble spirit.

Ashamed of, and heartily repenting that weakness, which, notwithstanding the duplicity of her representation, appeared so culpable in the eye of delicacy, Maud adverted no longer to the subject of her real and supposed injuries, forbearing to add an information which Sir William de Evreux had communicated just before the conclusion of her story by letter, namely, that the unfortunate Matilda, overpowered by the weight of reiterated calamity, was no longer in a situation to excite the rage which had been so repeatedly exercised against her. But another piece
of

of intelligence, which followed Sir William's, convinced the Empress that the situation so long and so variously contended for by this misjudging woman, was now to be deprived of a resource which, however impolitically neglected, had proved her first, her surest, and chiefest safeguard—or only to be in some degree preserved by means that would effectually destroy the gratification of her dearest purposes.

The disappointment of that hope which induced Maud to trust her limited confession to a friend, whose virtues she fondly fancied would reflect a portion of their purity upon her own equivocal ones—and from whose indulgence she conceived an idea of being justified in all these cases to which that justification might apply, the Empress quitted her society with an emotion allied to disgust, and sought her

her brother, from whom she expected a confirmation of Matilda's demise—when, in her passage to his closet, she was struck by the melancholy aspect of several retainers, and serving men, who contrary to the independant cheerfulness which marked the manners of those who were happy enough to attend the Earl, were stationed in mournful silence in their different departments.

To the deep and awful reverence of every inferior Maud had been familiarized, as, contrary to Earl Robert's practice, she measured the esteem and veneration of her subjects by the solemn distance they observed; till finding, as she advanced, that they attempted to shun her presence, and the questions she was disposed to ask. Maud enquired for their lord—and if he were within—a laconic—"No, gracious lady," was the only answer she obtained; and,

as if fearful of farther interrogations, they, one by one, respectfully retreated. She then surveyed the different apartments of his suite, and was stepping from a ground summer-room that opened upon a spacious garden, where alarmed by the appearance of several knights in conference with Fitz-Milo, she felt desirous to know the subject of their conference.

They were covered with the dirt of unfrequented roads, and upon a nearer survey, she perceived her brother's esquire and several pages among the group.

There was nothing extraordinary in this meeting, as it was extremely probable they might have accompanied the Earl in his morning's ride, and on their return, had stopped to inform Count Milo of some uninteresting event.

But,

But, on a nearer and unseen approach, she perceived every mark of terror and uneasiness on the brow of Fitz-Milo.

The first idea that occurred, was, that the legate had detached a force sufficient to beset the city of Gloucester; and that her brother was absent upon business relative to the intended siege—which ready-formed suspicion accounting for the mistrust and melancholy she had noticed among his friends and dependants, it obliterated every doubt respecting *his* personal safety—but her *own* now became a subject of serious consideration; and she waited impatiently for Fitz-Milo's information, as he, in pursuance of a signal she gave him, hastened from the road beyond the hedge to attend her commands.

To her abrupt demand for an explanation of her fears, the countenance
E 2 of

of the baron gave a foreboding answer—
and humanity seemed to linger upon
the denunciation which must carry dag-
gers to the heart of his sovereign.—

“ You hesitate, my lord — Where is

“ Gloucester ? — What means this re-

“ luctance ? — If Stephen has obtained

“ his liberty — If the treacherous bishop

“ has fought his way through an ene-

“ my’s territory, and threatens the li-

“ berty of an unfortunate woman, it

“ becomes you to undeceive her.” “ I

“ *would* undeceive my gracious Em-

“ press,” replied Fitz-Milo, “ but how

“ can I tell her that, although the le-

“ gate, for aught we can judge, is ig-

“ norant of our present calamity, her

“ sole support — the pillar of her cause

“ — the great, the gallant Gloucester

“ has fallen a” — “ No more, thou

“ horrid harbinger of evil ! — Croak not

“ the death of so noble a soldier ! — Yes

“ — he is dead ! — Thy rueful counten-

“ ance

“ance confirms it!—He *is* dead, and
“Stephen has escaped!”——“Now the
“Blessed Virgin forbid,” cried de
Evreux, who heard the conclusion of
this rapid decision—“Stephen is safe;
“and Gloucester in being!—Would I
“could go no farther—but it must be
“known!—Our noble Earl is taken
“prisoner by a party of archers, who
“accidentally met him on the road to
“Oxford, whither he was going for the
“purpose of securing yet more power—
“fully the interest of her citizens in
“your favour.”

Still thought Maud, as she wiped off
the tear this intelligence extorted—
Still must *I* be the ultimate cause of
every suffering his gallant heart has en-
dured!—Oh, Gloucester, what a fate is
thine!—Disappointed in every dear and
rational expectation—thwarted—contra-
dicted—even defied by *her* whose vio-
lence

lence could not force thee to neglect her as she deserves.

The apostrophe was sudden—its motive transient—and self again predominated. Desirous to know how far her own danger might be involved with his, she consulted with these trusty veterans, as to the methods she should take to ascertain the true spring from whence this unhappy event arose; and, agreeably to the advice of her friends, she dispatched a courier to the place of her brother's confinement, who immediately discovered the artful bishop as a leading principal in this business.

Sir William de Evreux then undertook to open a negotiation with the legate, who freely acknowledged the glory he had obtained by this successful step; and in answer to Sir William's question, as to the ransom expected—

“Go,”

“Go,” cried the turbulent priest, “and
“tell your haughty mistress, Earl Glou-
“cester is no common acquisition;—
“not all the riches her well-crouded
“coffers can boast are equal to the pur-
“chase of such a gem—which, while
“possessed seemed valueless to her—
“but we *know* his worth, and can even
“honour that integrity which imprison-
“ment itself can neither shake or dimi-
“nish; however, she has *one* equivalent,
“and only one, in all her vast posses-
“sions, that can answer our expecta-
“tions—Stephen, my injured brother, it
“is his liberty alone that must compen-
“sate for Gloucester’s—Let her set *him*
“free, and Robert shall be free also.”
“I dare not,” cried the candid nego-
ciator,—“my lord, I dare not make
“the proposition—all that entreaty or
“remonstrance can do has been tried in
“vain; it is certain *I* am an aged worn-
“out creature, scarcely worth the keep-
“ing,

“ing, but if you choose to accept *me*
“as an hostage, I am at your service
“till the conditions can be realized,
“which shall establish the Earl’s liberty
“on honourable terms.” — “We dis-
“pute not the consequence of a de
“Evreux,” returned the legate, “his
“worth — his battles — his unforfeited
“rectitude is well known; — but in this
“instance, the equality is deficient —
“prince for prince. We confess the
“similitude of their claims; and the il-
“legitimacy of Gloucester is abundant-
“ly covered by his superior merits — son
“of a potent king, and the admiration
“of a great nation, we are not unwill-
“ing to class him with one whose rights
“as a real sovereign we are bound to
“support: — This, then, is our fixed
“determination; retire in safety, Sir
“William, and give your Empress our
“alternative — Stephen — or Glou-
“cester.”

How

How bitter soever this alternative might prove, the Empress was not in a situation to reject it with her usual defiance. Deprived of an able counsellor by the very means he was aiming to subvert, and conscious how little she could depend upon those barons who still adhered to her from the rectitude of a principle which no adventitious incident could alter, yet more than from any interest her behaviour while their sovereign had secured, there seemed to be a climax in her fate, beyond which destruction appeared in its most formidable light.

Hitherto the passions of her heart, although a limited indulgence had been allowed them, had stopped short of actual and decided criminality—in her transactions regarding the fate of Matilda, the utmost extent of her intentions reached not further than perpetual

confinement—and, though she could not wish to invalidate the repeated reports of her death, she was contented with maintaining a constant opposition to her search after happiness, nor once relaxed that sort of severity from the exercise of which much evil might be expected. But now, her mind enflamed to a pitch of temporary madness, became the reluctant fabrication of schemes too diabolical for contemplation, and the encouragement and rejection of them were the work of a very few minutes.

To be *compelled* by a triumphant enemy to release the frustrator of every grand design—to confess, by this action, her submission to the man she had exulted over—would be to part with every particle of that power his captivity ensured—“No,” cried the miserable Empress, “not the recovery of that kind
“and valued friend could compensate
“for

“for the mischief such an exchange
“must produce.”

In this shocking exigence, her torment was encreased by the weight of a business she conceived herself wholly obliged to sustain. To argue the matter with de Evreux would be to furnish weapons against her own opinion; and there was no medium in this case that Lady de Warrenne could offer, were Maud inclined to trust her with her perplexities, as the delicacy and generosity of that lady's sentiments would pronounce immediately on the question for Gloucester's emancipation.

The night succeeding this unwelcome intelligence was passed by the Empress in a sleepless and tearful anxiety; and when Sir William demanded an audience upon the subject of Stephen's liberation, he found her nearly incapable

of rational discrimination; every power of her soul was involved in that horrid anxiety which baffles the calmness of quiet disquisition. "And must I," cried the agitated lady, "must I, to recover a
" blessing, alas, once too little prized,
" put arms into the hands of an enemy
" who will soon render the acquisition
" of that blessing ineffectual?—Think
" for me, Sir William—judge for me—
" my mind is in tumults—I see nothing
" but inexpressible misery in my acceptance of these terms—Go back to
" the legate; tell him, on his peril to
" detain the noble prisoner—how dare
" *he* prescribe conditions to his lawful
" sovereign!"

To think for—to judge the cause of a woman, whose rage prevented even the privilege of thought, was a matter to which even the patience of de Evreux was unequal; and in a moment's interval
of

of the Empress's fury, he frankly assured her no other terms would be accepted; indeed, it was his firm opinion, that Stephen should be released—"I know
"it—I know it"—interrupted the wrathful Maud—"fool that I am to ask for
"such an opinion!—but mark me, fir—
"The majesty of England shall *not*
"stoop to the plausible qualities of a
"base usurper; and be the consequence
"what it may, I have him and I'll hold
"him fast—yes—even to——"

The deadly paleness of her visage, as she hesitated to pronounce a fatal denunciation, too well explained her meaning. De Evreux shuddered, and forbearing to press his motives for her acquiescence, retired in the utmost disturbance, leaving her in a situation the most unenviable even to humiliated poverty—till the arrival and conversation of Cardinal Trapanti once more gave birth

birth to the hope of attaining her purpose without the mortifying conditions annexed.

To account for the interest this churchman took in the Empress's grievances, it may be necessary to state, that, disappointed in his attempts to obtain the legantine office which Calixtus, Pope of Rome, had conferred on Stephen's brother, Trapanti, sought every opportunity of mortifying the bishop, whose artful insinuations had not only deprived the Cardinal of his hopes, but contrived to render him an object of suspicion to Calixtus, by taxing him with an intent to favour the Antipope, Gregory; and to such a length were these suspicions carried, that the Cardinal, from regard to his personal safety, had quitted Italy to take up his residence in England; and since Maud arrived at Gloucester, the self-banished Italian was
seldom

feldom absent from court. Here he had remarked the effects of a disposition in some points fimilar to his own. Both were fwayed by a wish to render the family of Blois as contemptible to others as to themselves.

Trapanti, who possessed the true Italian principle, encouraged, although without any determinate plan, the cherished idea of a signal revenge; and while commending Maud's miscalled lenity to her captive, secretly hinted at more vigorous treatment as essential to her own safety.

The proposal respecting Gloucester's exchange was now communicated to her new friend with an acrimony she was sure would meet every indulgence from the only one whose opinion could be said to coincide with her own; and the unhappy Empress, who saw not beneath
the

the mask of a profound dissimulation, principles whose natural propensities needed not the real provocation they struggled with to render them more odious, felt a degree of relief in the ardent attention, the shrug of abhorrence, even the sigh of pity, with which her violent representations were received. When she had concluded, Trapanti listened with the air of one deeply concerned in the subject so expressively communicated to him, and perceiving she was silent, he asked "if she had not determined to defeat the palpable intention of her enemies." "*I would* defeat them, holy father; but with what weapons? Powerless, even friendless in this instance, who shall point out any possible means of extrication?" "*I can,*" returned the Cardinal, "*I will stand in the place of him you lament—Ask not to what degree, or how this engagement will* be

“ be completed—It is sufficient to know
“ that Maud *shall* triumph—that Eng-
“ land *shall* soon renew her allegiance”
—and, (lowering his voice), “ that Tra-
“ panti *shall* be revenged.

In the encouragement conveyed by such an assurance, the Empress felt every hope revived; and blinded by the eager desire to retain Stephen, and recover her brother, she saw not in her auxiliary's countenance the dark malignant expression of rancour which the conclusion of his apostrophe kindled—yet, after a moment's consideration, she felt anxious to understand in what way this important business was to be performed—or how a foreigner, almost a total stranger to English laws, customs, and prejudices, could, by his single prowess, perform a deed of such importance.

As

As if conscious of the curiosity his asseveration must inspire, and willing to try how far she might be inclinable to rely upon his assistance, Trapanti, with a smile composed of Italian finesse, and the deep subtilty of a heart alive only to its own feelings, respectfully congratulated her upon the prospect of future greatness; and artfully insinuated a hope that she would go hand in hand with him in the arduous undertaking. Maud started—Her objection to an unlimited trust gained strength—and she gravely expressed her denial to every scheme, from the premature knowledge of which she was to be excluded.

Trapanti blushed—The vexation of his soul, at this untoward question, would have betrayed him to any one less anxious than Maud for the accomplishment of her desires.—But recovering himself, and fixing a penetrating look upon

upon her embarrassed features—"Is
"there," cried this consummate dis-
sembler, "Is there a situation more
"dangerous—more open to the ma-
"chinations of villany, than her's be-
"fore me—Deprived of a resource
"which has hitherto preserved her from
"destruction—Solicited by an enemy
"to resign the last hope of her declin-
"ing cause—and certain that in that re-
"signation is implied the entire loss of
"a crown—perhaps life."—The Em-
press trembled—"For how are you
"assured that Gloucester's restoration
"will follow that of Stephen; and when
"the main spring is clogged, and its
"lesser wheels restored to action, who
"can temper the velocity with which
"they will move, or with what power
"you can check them."—"But the
"means, holy pastor," said the impa-
tient Maud, whose imagination these
forcible suggestions had disposed to ad-
mit

mit whatever he should devise—" name
" them, my lord, nor fear the intre-
" pidity of an injured woman." " I
" know but *one*," answered Trapanti,
while he examined every working fea-
ture, as if anxious to learn how far he
might venture—" But *one*—True, lord
" Cardinal, there is but one—and that"
" —" Ay, lady—*that*, once atchieved,
" not all the powers of rebellion can
" shake your throne"—" Yet," hesita-
ted Maud—" even that expedient might
" be insufficient if"—" Impossible,"
exclaimed the priest, (who now con-
jectured her full approbation of his
horrid plan)—" we have only to accede
" in appearance to the legate's request
"—To appoint a place midway between
" Gloucester and Winchester (whither
" the noble Earl is carried) for the pur-
" pose of exchanging our respective
" prisoners, and"—" But Stephen,
" father—How shall we account for *his*
" absence

“absence—*He* must not be liberated.”
“*Liberated*,” repeated Trapanti, with the grin of a dæmon—“Yes, lady—he
“—he”—“He what”—“Why he
“must not be left out of the negocia-
“tion—His disposal will form the prin-
“cipal feature in it.”—“Surely,” observed the Empress, while her heart struggled to repress the horrid idea her thoughts conceived—“we do not understand each other—You do not—
“Just heavens!—You cannot mean to
“—to—strike at”—“His safety”—said the cunning cardinal—who immediately comprehended his mistake—and inwardly cursed the imbecility of a woman who would stop at nothing short of murder—and who could feel a barbarous delight in practising every species of cruelty, which chains and imprisonment could inflict upon a relation and an equal. But as her claims, expectations, and intentions became now in a degree
familiar

familiar to him, he determined to trust her with no more of his plans than could be assisted by *her* endeavours. With this design he went on to say—"that, previous to the arrangement hinted at, the Count of Blois must either be conveyed from England, or confined in its deepest obscurity; and that his unexpected death might be urged as an unanswerable motive for the performance of her engagement"—"Yet," observed she, "we are not to suppose that an enemy so vigilant, and so interested in the ruin of thy cause, would credit such an assertion; or that the Earl's emancipation will not be disputed—The villainess of a corrupted heart will not scruple to judge of others by its own"—"True," returned Trapanti, (while he repressed a smile of contemptuous incredulity at a remark which *he* deemed so uncharacteristic of the speaker)—"But it shall
" be

“be my business so to dispose of the
“Bishop of Winchester, as to render
“any opposition from him utterly
“vague—for, inflated as he may be in
“the possession of his great commission,
“the interest of Trapanti will again
“revive—and although it is sufficient
“to declare that if Calixtus himself
“should offer *me* the once contested ho-
“nour, I would refuse it, there is reason
“to suppose *he* cannot enjoy it long.”

So saying, he quitted the presence to prepare for the gratification of his *own* revenge, independant of his employer's advantage, any farther than from a consideration that her influence, as reigning sovereign of England, might advance his interest with a succeeding Pope.



CHAP. V.

THE dependance which Maud felt fully inclined to encourage on Trapanti's abilities in her behalf, made her shy of committing even to the warm-hearted de Evreux, any part of the intended business; and in consequence of his requesting another audience, the Empress received him with a cheerful aspect. He felicitated her on the visible change—The Empress smiled—but avoided any explanation; and turned to Lady de Warrene, whose supposed ignorance of

of Latin (the language in which Trapanti's conference had been held) made her presence of no moment. "You seem dejected, my lady," said her royal mistress, "Take courage; "our favourite will soon be in a way "to acknowledge the remembrance "of his friends."—"Pray Heaven "grant it," cried Sir William, (who perceived in the gentle Adela's countenance a mixture of horror, grief, and indignation). But when, on some pretence she made to pass him as he stood at some little distance from the Empress, he heard her distinctly whisper—"Guard the devoted "Stephen"—Sir William stopped, nor could utter another word—Trapanti's long and mysterious visit—The triumph of Maud—Her silence on a subject which, three hours before, was her incessant theme, wanted not so strong an inducement to distrust and suspicion;

VOL. II. F and

and in the honest confusion of his agitated thoughts, he did a thing which was, of all others, the most inimical to his intention, by bluntly demanding (when the shocking fears he began to entertain of some nefarious treachery would admit of speech) "What was
" concluded on respecting the Earl."

Accustomed to the deepest respect, Maud could not relish such abruptness, and disdained to answer a question which might lead to another, not altogether so easy to satisfy—besides, there was an air of defiance about de Evreux that seemed to speak a language she chose not to understand—Her silence—Her rejecting hand, as if commanding him to withdraw, conjoined with other symptoms, convinced him of Stephen's danger—and as prudence had never been the guide of his actions, so it now failed in its influence
upon

upon his speech, for, as he slowly retreated, he warned the Empress to forbear the commission of an act which, even the noble Robert would estimate as detestable; adding—"That conscious of the punctual discharge of his duty, in guarding the usurper, he dreaded no misrepresentation of his words, when he declared, that the same principles which secured to his mistress her royal prerogatives, would operate to preserve her from disgrace—and while employed in defending her sacred person from the attacks of an enemy, he should be equally tenacious in protecting that enemy from the culpable fury of ignoble revenge."

Somewhat alarmed by the decided and fearless manner in which Sir William expressed his resolution, Maud condescended to assure him that the

plan then agitating for her brother's deliverance, involved only a change of prison for the unfortunate Stephen—and as if desirous to escape the scrutiny of a guileless heart, put a finish to an audience which gave de Evreux the most poignant suspicion of some impending evil—and he sought Lady de Warrene, under an impression that she could explain the meaning of those dreadful words she had uttered; but from all that lady's imperfect knowledge of the Latin tongue allowed him to collect, it only appeared that Trapanti was a foe to the house of Blois, against which he meditated some dire mischief, either collectively or individually.—She therefore could only establish her motives for giving the mysterious warning, in her fears for Stephen, who was so completely in their power, that the Cardinal might, she thought, avail himself of the opportunity

portunity which so unhappily offered to exercise a partial revenge.

That there was an indubitable reason for these apprehensions, Sir William could not deny—yet to put Stephen upon his guard, manacled, emaciated, and sinking under the horrible supposition that Matilda, whose attendance on him in a dreary and unwholesome dungeon, had nearly if not quite destroyed, would be of little consequence, as death itself was, in the unhappy sufferer's estimation, divested of those terrors which cling to a soul about to be separated from all the enjoyments a smiling world can confer—And Sir William, distressed, and uncertain what step to take, was about to retire from the sympathizing de Warrenne, when he was suddenly arrested, and informed that his attendance upon Stephen would be dispensed with

in future (for it should be observed, that Maud, soon after her arrival at Gloucester, had caused her miserable captive to be conveyed to the dungeon of a castle within its vicinity).

Of course, de Evreux was a resident of the city; and, to his utter surprise, soon found himself an inmate, though not an inhabitant of so dreadful an apartment with his hapless companion, to whom he had shewn himself the condoling friend, and, indeed, his humanity bespoke him such, in a proper degree, to every son of affliction.

For several days succeeding this cruel event, Stephen, who derived every earthly source of consolation from his benevolent guard's diurnal visits, expressed a cruel uneasiness for an absence which, considering his great age, might

might be rationally attributed to a sudden demise, and used every possible means to obtain some knowledge of him; but Sir William's successors had none of those amiable weaknesses about them which distinguished *him*, and a fullen monosyllable, or silent rejection of his petition, were their general replications.

It now appeared to the wretched man that he had sunk to the depth of mortal misery—No eye beamed a ray of pity on his unsupported hope—No tongue dispensed the accents of kindness, or the effusions of sympathy, to meliorate the pungency of suffering—Light was supplied by a miserable lamp, which often left his gloomy abode in impenetrable darkness—And even the food, whose scanty portion had been regularly served, now, through the carelessness of his purveyors,

veyors, became very unequally administered.

In a situation so void of the common comforts of existence, the aids of religion were ineffectual to the purpose of relief---and while he prayed for a restoration of the good he had lost, he seemed to place his dearest hope on its recovery.

Thus lonely, and left to the contemplation of his various distresses, Stephen passed the solitary hour of midnight, (several of which were now revolved since the absence of de Evreux) when, long after the extinction of his feeble lamp, he perceived a light streaming through a small chink of his door. Convinced it argued something extraordinary at a time which, from repeated observation, he guessed was appropriated to rest,

rest, he waited, in anxious impatience, the result of this phenomenon, when the entrance of several ruffian-looking figures convinced him there was something yet left to dread, and proved that, however lightly we may estimate death when assailed by trying afflictions, yet there are no evils so heavy as that his near approach afflicts, for he sunk down on the mattress as if eager to shun his unwelcome visitors, while his eye intently followed their motions.

The first, who bore a lamp, which he placed on the floor, was shrouded with a long black cloak; and a large uncouth hat, made in the fashion of the times, served as a covering to his face, being drawn forward so as to conceal his features.

As Stephen, through excessive terrors and universal debility, lay de-

F 5

prived

prived of every external motion, the man, who had first advanced, again took up the lamp, and, beckoning to his fellows, approached the bed, and gazed attentively at the self-condemned victim, while his action seemed to express a supposition that he was no more; when a deep groan indicating some symptoms of returning life, the stranger raised him, and attempted to make the half-reviving creature swallow the contents of a phial he held in his hand. With a faint, rejecting motion, Stephen would have put it aside, feebly exclaiming—" 'Tis poison"—when, starting from his recumbent posture, and looking wildly on those around him, he added, "Oh, mercy, for heaven's sake!"—"Here are none but friends," cried a voice that almost convulsed the Count, "Drink this cordial—it will restore your fleeting powers."

Still

Still confused, and unable to account for the thrilling effect of those tones he had heard, Stephen was about to accept the offered beverage, when the approach of several footsteps, as descending the abyss, and the surprise this noise occasioned to Count Blois's visitant, induced him to turn his eyes to an object too interesting to be neglected.

The stranger had thrown aside his cloak, and discovered a rich yet light covering of half-armour. In one hand he grasped a glittering sword, and placing himself before Stephen, seemed to wait with a calm intrepidity some important event; while, on a sign given to his followers, they also threw off their cumbrous disguises, and armed with different weapons, attended in silent respect their superior's commands.

If Stephen had decided against the appearance of his mysterious companions, those who now entered afforded a still stranger motive for suspicion ; but before he could delineate their different characters, as portrayed by their habits, he observed, with increased astonishment, the gallant stranger attempt to seize the foremost of those who had last entered, at the moment he was aiming a fatal stroke at his powerful opponent, and a general scuffle immediately ensued.

For some minutes the contest was arduous ; till the stranger throwing his adversary with a considerable violence from him, he fell senseless against a projection of the wall ; and his assistants, who were much discouraged by this overthrow, readily submitted to their conqueror, who permitted them to raise his disabled antagonist ; and
then,

then, turning towards the Count, disclosed to him the features of Earl Gloucester. With clasped hands, overflowing eyes, and a heart whose turbulent gratitude impeded his acknowledgments for a deliverance which yet he could not either understand, or properly appreciate, Stephen would have fallen before his gallant friend, but he waving all particulars respecting this wonderful business, struck off his disgraceful chains, and told him "*he was free.*"

During this undertaking, (in which one of his men assisted him, two more were employed in guarding the wounded person's followers, and another, understanding his lord's intention, had retired several minutes before) Stephen who, notwithstanding the delirium of pleasure that a prospect of freedom excited,

excited, could not help noticing the earnest glances Gloucester cast towards the door, while he expressed, in half words, his wonder that Richard did not return; but a short time relieved his suspense, and Richard entered, leading a small and apparently fragile figure, that sunk into Earl Robert's arms, which were readily extended for the purpose. He then ordered his people to retire with their prisoners, directing them to pay every attention to the state of their chief, and naming the apartment in which they were to be secured.

When they were retired, the Earl, who had seated his helpless charge on a low bench, asked his enraptured friend if he were able to bear another joyful surprise? Stephen, who had shook off his fetters with a degree of strength which the new-born ideas of glorious

glorious liberty induced, looked to the wild figure for an explanation—and in the next instant was bid to recognise his loved Matilda.

“ Now, then indeed”, exclaimed the empassioned husband, while he clasped her to his palpitating bosom, “ I may defy every future calamity!—Heaven—ly deliverer!” addressing the almost happy Gloucester, “ if there be a reward beyond all we can suppose of future felicity, for you it is reserved—Noblest pattern of all human excellence, indulge the grateful effusions of a swelling heart, or”——
“ No more, Count Stephen, your fate yet hangs in suspense, and depends on the event of a few hours—We shall meet, I trust, at a season when every passing moment is not replete with hazard—at present you must submit to my guidance—I will support

“port the Countess; *you* must follow
“as you can—Come, lady, accept my
“arm.”

Speechless from the effect of an anxiety which agitated a soul formed upon the tenderest principles, Matilda could only press the hand of her protector, while the look she threw upon her emancipated husband, comprised every sweet hope of renewed felicity.

To account for Earl Robert's appearance at a juncture so critical to Stephen's safety, it will be necessary to delineate the incidents as they occurred, which brought forward the very circumstance Trapani was so earnest to defeat, who had spun his scheme with materials of too flimsy a texture to bear the attacks of united goodness. Jealous of every one whose integrity was equal to their loyalty,
and

and dreading the singular distinterest-
edness of Sir William de Evreux,
whose unequivocal attachment to
Maud, preserved in her esteem a su-
periority against which there was no
appeal; he no sooner heard that the
Empress had admitted him, than he was
determined, if possible, to counteract
his honest endeavours to serve Stephen,
and boldly ventured to seize his per-
son without Maud's concurrence,
trusting to the machinations of a pro-
lific brain, for the excuse he must
offer.

It was indeed with some difficulty
she was brought to credit the Cardi-
nal's motives and intentions, relative
to this arrest, namely, that it was high-
ly necessary to prevent all communi-
cation with Stephen, lest the misguided
knight should unwittingly lead the
Count to suspect their design; or that
overcome

overcome by an ill-timed humanity he might even be led to connive at his escape.

At any rate, Trapanti engaged that the veteran should be released in a few days; and Maud not conceiving a confinement so temporary could be of much importance, forbore any further objection, especially as she stipulated he should enjoy the comforts of society, and on this stipulation hung the delivery of Stephen and its attendant consequences; for Lady de Warrenne, who beheld with indignant astonishment such an infringement on the laws of the country, made no scruple of visiting her ancient favourite, and from him learned many incidents respecting Maud's treatment of Matilda—as also the necessity there was of counteracting the Cardinal's designs against Count Stephen—"Were Lord Gloucester,"

“ Gloucester,” observed the brave knight, “ at liberty, Trapanti would soon find his precious plots traversed—now by my good sword, (which I never yet disgraced)” cried he, “ if there were but the least possibility of exposing this faintly Cardinal to our deluded mistress, I would run every hazard to forward the precious business.”

Lady de Warrenne joined in the wish of undeceiving her royal friend, but the attempt was too full of danger to be thought of; and she could only offer her services in any way Sir William could point out for the benefit of the unhappy Matilda. “ She is yet alive,” said the benevolent veteran, “ and languishes in a miserable obscurity, about a mile from hence—a week only has elapsed since her life was supposed to be in the utmost
“ danger,

“ danger, nay, that before my messenger could return she would be
“ numbered with the dead ; and I was
“ justified in hinting to the Empress
“ that she was no more—but that, indeed, is of no consequence, since
“ the dear unhappy creature can
“ no longer be an object (at least I
“ would hope so) of jealousy to her
“ once mortified rival.”

The task of assisting and comforting a lady whose fate had been so singularly eventful, was accepted by Adela with all the alacrity a generous heart could inspire ; and before the next evening, Matilda experienced the sweet and soothing attentions of an opulent and sympathizing friend ; and was somewhat revived by the intelligence Lady de Warrenne communicated, “ that Stephen had not yet
“ given

“given way to his dreadful calamity.”

By the same means which afforded to Adela a limited guess at Trapanti's schemes, she was again enabled to come at a further knowledge of his plan, and heard, with horror, that the benefit arising from an exchange of prisoners, which was to take place immediately, extended not to Stephen; and the abhorrence she had of Trapanti's duplicity, furnished a clue to more of his pernicious intention than Maud herself possessed, since it shewed every hint he touched upon in a sombre shade, and what she could not understand she put down to the account of secret villainy; nor did this conduct militate against her usual candour, since, persuaded of his baseness in confining Sir William, and that it was to serve some cruel, yet latent purpose,

pose, she gave him credit for still more atrocious actions.

Convinced then, from all she could make out of the necessity of counter-acting Trapanti's designs, her next business was to consult with her faithful counsellor upon the steps necessary to be taken—and he immediately advised her to send a private courier to Earl Robert, with a full and concise relation of her several discoveries; well knowing that his integrity and humanity would act conjointly in the important exigence.

Lady de Warrenne paused upon this dangerous expedient—Earl Gloucester was a prisoner—and who (thought she) can insure the safe delivery of a packet so important as that Sir William meditated to send—neither could she entirely depend upon any one in her
suite

suite for its safe conveyance ; till suddenly arising, " I will see the Earl
" myself, Sir William," she cried,
" nor dread the censure such a visit
" may incur—'Tis a business with which
" the customs of a world (too apt to
" draw conclusions from evident effect)
" has nothing to do—a visit to my long
" neglected seat will be a sufficient excuse—Look, therefore, to hear the
" particulars of my embassy in less
" time perhaps than a courier could
" gratify you."—" Then there *are*
" hopes," said the pleased de Evreux,
" hopes which shall enliven this withered bosom—Depart then, lady,
" with an old man's blessing—it can do
" no injury either to the cause you
" have espoused or the goodness which
" supports it."

Adela felt encouraged by the sanction she received, and departed with

with a strong assurance of defeating the new enemy, whom Stephen had most reason to dread.

The reception given to Lady de Warrenne on her arrival at Winchester, (where Gloucester then resided) was a proof in those early times of the reverence paid to female delicacy, and an irreproachable character; nor when she mentioned the subject of her errand, as relating to Earl Robert, did the legate express either curiosity or suspicion, at a visit so unusual.

To the representation she gave of Maud's concurrence with Cardinal Trapanti's mysterious plans, which seemed to strike at Stephen's future safety, perhaps his life—and the imprisonment of de Evreux—the Earl listened with marks of indignation and friendly

friendly concern. He had already signified to the legate his acquiescence to the proposed exchange of Stephen for himself; and felt extremely hurt at the Empress's apparent inattention to a brother's interest, whose situation, although attended with every convenient distinction, was still dishonorable and inimical to his wish to render that infatuated sister his usual services.

But Lady de Warrenne's intelligence struck him as conveying the idea of a dreadful collusion, the intent of which might involve him in yet deeper perplexity.

Before he could settle what means to pursue that could possibly invalidate the intentions of the plotting couple, my Lord of Winchester, willing to evince his respect to Gloucester and his noble visitor, summoned them to a

sumptuous repast; but Adela, satisfied with the success of her negotiation, was in haste to depart; and maugre the bishop's earnest invitation, departed immediately for her own seat, leaving to Earl Robert's superior knowledge and prudence, the management of this important business.

Of the legate's confidence in his prisoner's strict honour, that nobleman had received the most distinguished proofs—His attendants—his establishment—his apartments were all in a very superior stile; and the prelate had been heard to declare, that so great was his reliance upon that good man's word, as to deem it a sufficient guarantee for his most mysterious actions.

This assurance, at a moment when it might become extremely necessary, was a cordial to his benevolent heart; and
although

although the bishop's behaviour in many instances carried no such recommendation, Earl Robert was now possessed of circumstances powerful enough to secure his firmest interest, nor doubted but he would aid the execution of a scheme which had Stephen's safety, nay, his emancipation for its basis.

How to disclose this matter so as to avoid criminating the Empress, required the utmost exertion of his abilities—but here Lady de Warrenne's visit was of use—The legate, impatient to congratulate his brother upon his recovered liberty, enquired “If Gloucester
“ had gathered from his friend any
“ reason to imagine the Empress would
“ accede to the proposals transmitted
“ by de Evreux? The Earl hesitated
—It was the chord which, if properly struck, would give motion and potency to the very plot he was agitating. “I

“ see,” observed Winchester, (while his countenance assumed a resentful hue)
“ you cannot gratify my reasonable expectation: Maud continues to sacrifice
“ every relative and even prudent claim
“ to her unbounded pride—but no matter, she may yet repent her temerity.”
“ My lord,” answered the Earl, “ that
“ misguided princess requires the counsels of a cool discriminating friend;
“ she is surrounded by those to whom
“ neither her’s or your brother’s interest is of consequence, any farther
“ than as it may tend to promote their own—Even the gallant and faithful
“ de Evreux, to whom Stephen stands
“ indebted for numberless kindnesses, is
“ thrown into prison for venturing to
“ enforce your candid proposal; nor can
“ I, at this distance, suggest any means
“ for the furtherance of your wishes—
“ Our country must be ruined in the
“ contest

“contest!—May Robert, of Gloucester,
“not live to witness it!”

As if fearful of a moment's delay to the execution of a scheme that promised the accomplishment of his hopes, Winchester, starting from his seat, and striking the table before him with his clenched fist, “I have it, my lord,” he cried, “*your* honour is my security for
“the hazard I am going to run—you—
“yes, *you* shall go to your sister un-
“guarded, and almost unlimited as to
“the nature of your commission—you
“shall prove to that rash woman the
“result of a life of integrity; and that
“Winchester can trust *your* word where
“*her* oath would not be taken—Go,
“then, and paint the evils which her
“obstinacy must bring upon a wretched
“nation, if she continues to retain my
“unhappy brother. Should she men-
“tion any additional conditions which

"*you* may think proper to be granted,
" short of pecuniary incumbrance, tell
" her they shall be accepted."

It required all the humility Earl Robert possessed, to receive this noble and generous commission without open exultation. It was the very proposal, although in a limited sense, which he intended making; and he immediately prepared for his departure, with a steady resolution, however the Empress might receive him, to act with his usual prudence and moderation, determining, notwithstanding, to liberate Stephen at any rate.

From the information Lady de Warrenne had communicated, he expected to meet Trapanti at court; and in this he was not disappointed, for the Empress was, at that juncture, in the very act of settling with her agent the preliminaries
respecting

respecting her conceding, in part, to Winchester's request.

The presence of him for whom she was involving herself in a troublesome and dangerous business, furnished new matter for self-congratulation; for the idea that his liberty was only conditional never entered a heart so selfish as hers. Trapanti was disappointed; this appearance argued no gratification to his revenge; but when Gloucester, in answer to his sister's felicitations, informed her of his real situation, the Cardinal's triumph was in proportion to his colleague's mortification, who protested against the terms on which her brother was to perpetuate his own freedom, namely, that of conducting Stephen back to Winchester.

Convinced from this denial of the danger resulting from an open declara-

tion of his intentions, Gloucester formed his plan without any remonstrance upon the cruelty of precipitating him again into a state of captivity; and coldly adverted to different subjects; nor would he, when the Cardinal was departed, listen to the plausible motives Maud assigned for her strange and unfeeling conduct.

His next visit was to Lady de Warrenne, who accompanied him to her ancient friend's apartment, where, after de Evreux had expressed his happiness in once more embracing the noble Earl, it was settled that Stephen should be conveyed on that very night from his dreadful abode; and the good Adela engaged to prepare Matilda for the blessing of once more embracing her husband in peace and security.

But

But while this arrangement was contriving (with a care that left no probable danger unguarded) a storm was just ready to overwhelm and destroy their well-settled plan : The Cardinal, whose policy was more than a match for his adversary's integrity, had observed in his noble features a latent indignation, which seemed restrained by nothing but an intended resort to other considerations for the performance of the business he came about ; and as every thing was concluded upon for forcing his wretched victim to some place more congenial for the purpose of murder, he resolved to execute his horrid intent before the dawn of another day, and impatiently waited for the silent hour of midnight, when the abettors of his cruelty were to meet him beneath the north wall of the castle ; but owing to some misapprehension, they did not arrive till near one, and happily (as the devoted Stephen

C 5

then

then imagined) they came but to suffer a dangerous and shameful defeat.

Trapanti (for *he* it was who sunk under Gloucester's victorious arm) had received a wound which rendered him for some time a very impotent *personal* enemy; but his talents—his politics—his revenge, wanted not the auxiliary force of manual attack—He was foiled, but not overcome; and Earl Robert had yet to learn, that Italian finessè was more than a match for the probity of a spirit unused to the wiles of a horrid duplicity.

The dependance which Maud so firmly placed upon her colleague's adroitness in the conduct of an affair which he had engaged to bring to a speedy and honorable issue, was somewhat shaken by his unusual absence from her court at a period so interesting, and which threatened to disarrange the scheme so well contrived,

contrived, and so thoroughly digested ; but as that scheme was for the present entirely defeated, Trapanti, who had yet another card to play, sent no account of his present situation ; and the heart of the Empress, thus torn and perplexed by violent and contradictory feelings, became the seat of accumulated vexations, which she could neither disperse or account for,

CHAP. VI.

THE success which had attended Earl Robert's endeavours to liberate Stephen, while it justified the confidence Winchester reposed in him, was not without alloy ; true, it established the generosity of a character which this transaction exhibited in a new and superior light, but there yet remained a difficulty that demanded a critical and cautious management. Trapanti was conquered ; but his principles ; his motives for this intended cruelty ; and his powers of doing much

much mischief were still to be counter-acted.

It was impossible in the enfeebled state to which the illustrious pair had been reduced, to convey them to Winchester without suspicion; a wain, constructed for the purpose of invalids, must be procured, and even this would occasion suspicion. Their present residence too was insecure, which, on account of Trapanti, whose emissaries he dreaded, was in an obscure undefended cottage, without the city gates; and there was every reason to suppose his sister would be informed of the late transaction, whose fury at a discovery so derogatory to her dignity, and which might possibly endanger her pretensions yet farther, would reach, he doubted not, to the extent of a power uncircumscribed by reason, and unchecked by the gentle movements of a tender heart.

The

The amiable qualities and singular sufferings of those to whose convenience and safety he had sacrificed so much, would, he well knew, operate to their disadvantage on the feelings of their determined persecutor; nor had he now the smallest confidence in his own power over her irascible disposition.

To procure then the complete emancipation of his charge, was the subject of Gloucester's painful cogitation; and so much was he prepossessed with an idea of their danger, as scarcely to credit the evidence of Lady de Warrenne, who personally assured him on the evening succeeding their arrival at the cottage where she passed a few anxious moments with Stephen and his Matilda, that no event had transpired to justify his fears. Thus re-assured he adverted to his own situation as guardian of his
sister's

sister's claim, and confessedly the protector of the realm ; and while humanity and pity, the dictates of the purest principles, justified the step he had taken, that high unfulfilled honor which was in Earl Robert on hereditary instinct, now pointed out to his reflecting mind the person thus unconditionally liberated as a confessed opposer of another's lawful right ; and that other was his long defended, and still beloved, though hardly esteemed sister. Certainly her competitor was possessed of such a mixture of amiable and splendid qualities as rendered him much more deserving of the station she so imperiously and improperly filled, yet to account satisfactorily for a conduct which carried on the face of it (to a partial or superficial observer) the shade of duplicity, was a circumstance extremely irksome to a nobleman so tenacious of his integrity, and rendered him averse
even

even to an audience with Maud, from that as well as another consideration, namely, that she expressly preferred the gratification of a revengeful spirit to the comforts or even safety of her well tried friend.

However the Earl might wish to render the motives which actuated his whole soul co-operative, he was invariably determined to complete the work so successfully began, and set himself to compass an end so desirable.

From Adela he received, by a private messenger, the most favourable account of the invalids; and from a desire to keep his intentions an entire secret from the Empress, her brother was induced to avoid her presence, and also every cause for the smallest suspicion respecting the hiding place of her enemies.

Several

Several days had now elapsed in the preparation for the arrangement respecting Stephen's journey; and the morning arrived which was fixed upon for his departure. A trusty band of soldiers in the garb of peasants was appointed for his escort; and disguised like one of them, the half-reluctant Stephen quitted the cottage, where Gloucester, for prudential reasons, advised him to leave Matilda, who, under Lady de Warrenne's protection and guidance, might hereafter be conveyed to Winchester, when a favourable occasion should offer for her departure.

The heroic soul of that exemplary creature had seldom experienced a pang so severe as the one which this unexpected separation occasioned. The qualities of that soul were of the softest composition, but the various trials and distresses she had endured, instead of enervating,

enervating, gave it an energy which seemed inherent; smothering, therefore, the bursting sigh which interposed with the advice she would have cheerfully given, and turning aside to wipe off a tear that would not be restrained, she gently withdrew from those arms she fondly fancied would prove in future her defence from every earthly evil—and careful to avoid any fruitless indulgence of a weakness too common with those who seek occasions to heighten every afflicting scene by dwelling upon the sad effects a feeble mind continually forebodes, she would not trust herself with a long and distant view of her consort's lingering steps, as he slowly ascended the eminence that arose before the door of her asylum, but quitting it immediately, sought consolation by the usual mode then in the practice of zealous catholics.

With

With the shades of a mild autumnal evening arrived Matilda's estimable comforter, Lady de Warrenne, who, conscious of her friend's lonely state, and the disappointment she must have endured in this unexpected separation from her beloved, excused herself from a personal attendance on the Empress, and hastened to support (should that be necessary) the feeble spirit of her favourite. With a grateful heart Matilda acknowledged her obligation for such goodness, and rewarded Adela by her successful endeavours to appear composed.

As the disguises they both assumed (for Lady de Warrenne wore that of a peasant girl in her visits to the cottage, and Stephen's queen shrouded her person in the dress of an ancient British woman; while the damsel Eda's coarse attire equally sheltered her from observation)

fervation) rendered any accidental discovery of their persons nearly impossible, these affectionate friends ventured to exceed the bounds of their usual walks, which, owing to Matilda's extreme debility, hitherto extended only to a little plat at the front of the dwelling; but now they reached the acclivity of a road leading from Gloucester. The sweet serenity which reposed upon every object within view—The clearness of an horizon that had no visible obstruction—And the calm of an approving heart, so much more powerfully felt than described, produced upon Matilda the sweetest effect—Her hopes were enlarged—Her expectations extended—Her tears of devout thankfulness, and the gratitude of an affectionate soul to the author of every blessing, her husband's probable escape would necessarily accomplish, were proofs, indeed, of the sentiments this matchless woman

woman encouraged, and conveyed to her benevolent companion a portion of that delight her own pure mind imbibed.

As the evening began to close with a chillness not unusual after a lovely September afternoon, Lady de Warrenne mentioned it as an inducement for their return; and the rays of a lamp, which, at some distance from the cottage window communicated a degree of cheerfulness to the fatigued Matilda, who, induced, by the soft and smiling aspect of the glowing scenes before her, had ventured beyond her strength, and leaning upon Eda's arm (who joined in the tender offices with lady Adela in supporting the helpless invalid homewards) she re-entered an abode which, from Stephen's absence, appeared to derive a still and melancholy look; but mindful of a resolution which gained vigour from exertion,

exertion, she quietly seated herself at the supper-table, and prepared to partake of the light viands her delicate state rendered necessary.

During the slight repast, as Eda was administering a cup of wine, she started with a vehemence that communicated a sudden terror to the nerves of the two ladies ; and Matilda following the eye of her terrified damsel, observed it fixed on some object without the casement, while a faint and hollow sound, as of one in extreme pain, met her ear. Without *one* male protector—herself an object (if discovered) of the most virulent antipathy—the uncertain situation of him whose safety comprised her hope of future felicity—and the impossibility of her own escape, should any unexpected incident render such a step unavoidable—all taken together, not only rushed upon Matilda's mind, but nearly destroyed the equanimity

mity she had so hardly attained ; and she gazed upon her alarmed friend, as if eager to derive comfort from the explanation she expected her to give—" I see, and can allow for your terrors, " my dearest lady," cried Adela, (rising as she spoke, and cautiously drawing another bolt of the door) " but cannot encourage the forboding your speaking countenance suggests — Some weary traveller, allured by the light, would ask for the shelter it would be imprudent in us to grant." There was reason in the supposition, and the plaintive voice of distress suing for admittance, which followed this observation, assured the trembling lady, and she directed Eda to word her refusal in the gentlest terms ; but how was the horror of her ideas encreased, when, in answer to the damsel's gentle denial, the suppliant mentioned Stephen's name, and in incoherent language, spoke of assassination,

nation, treason, and imprisonment. The fatal truth now flashed upon Matilda as she staggered towards the unclosed door with an intent to admit the wretched pleader. Eda drew back, and Lady de Warrenne made no opposition, for she too well recognised in the tones of the poor creature some that were quite familiar to her ear—"It is John Mowbray, my friend," she cried—"And one of my beloved's guards," added the almost frantic sufferer, while she shuddered convulsively at the figure which crawled towards her. His peasant's dress was hardly distinguishable, from the injuries it had sustained, and hung in tattered fragments about him. The armour beneath, was hacked in various places; and the blood which flowed from several wounds told a tale of sorrow to the heart of his respected mistress, who withdrew not from his trembling grasp the hand he feebly seized

seized—"I die, lady," cried the fainting de Mowbray, "as a loyal subject
"to the best of sovereigns should—a
"defender of his sacred cause."—
"Then Stephen is destroyed!—Oh,
"Lady de Warrenne," she said "speak
"you of comfort now?"—My friend,"
said the sympathizing consoler, "your
"excessive sorrow defies the exertion of
"reason—De Mowbray is overcome—
"Support him, Eda, he will soon re-
"cover sufficiently, I trust, to dispel the
"heaviest of your lady's suspicions."

Eda had now drawn forward a sort of couch on which she contrived to place the dying warrior, and then applied a cordial to his parched lips. Greedily did he swallow the refreshing beverage, and attempting to raise himself, beckoned with excessive agitation to his royal lady—"What would
"my faithful servant?" cried Matilda,
VOL. II. H while

while her streaming tears embalmed as it were his gory locks and sunken features, "Speak, dear Mowbray—but speak of comfort—Say that your worshipped monarch is but safe."—"He cannot understand you, Madam," fobbed the assiduous Eda, (while she passed her arm beneath his drooping head).—"He is dying, sweet Matilda," observed Lady de Warrenne, as she noticed the spasmodic symptoms of approaching death, "leave him to Eda"—"No," articulated the gasping victim, "sacred mistress—*your* life—*you*—oh, fly—the thing is"—Eda shrieked—The verdict of death was passed on the expiring John, a violent struggle succeeded, and he spoke no more.

Thus left to the distracting suggestions of her agonized soul, Matilda could listen to no alleviating suppositions of her pitying companion. The danger

danger hinted at by de Mowbray, as attaching to herself, she thought not of, and the remainder of that eventful night elapsed in all the bitterness of excessive sorrow; while Eda was necessarily employed in disposing, with all the decency their situation would allow, of the cold object of all this cruel disturbance, and conveyed it to a small inner apartment, where, reclining it on the stone pavement, and covering it from observation, she left for the present all other duties to be performed as holy mother church ordains.

Wholly to contradict or adopt the terrible opinion Matilda had formed of her husband's decease, was equally beyond Lady de Warrenne's skill. That Stephen had been attacked, and possibly taken prisoner, was among the mildest of her apprehensions; and this opinion she strenuously

ously endeavoured to maintain, in opposition to the anxious doubts of her friend, who, in the sad indulgence of her own fears, forgot not one gleam of hope, as to gaining some intelligence of her lamented consort. The Earl of Gloucester could, doubtless, inform her of the particulars she even dreaded to know; but to wait in that suspense, which even a few hours rendered almost intolerable, seemed terrible but to think of. "Trust to me, my beloved Matilda," cried the excellent Adela, (who pitied most sincerely the sufferings she would most gladly have relieved) "*I* am acquainted with Lord Robert's present residence—*I* will go to him immediately, and relate what we know of this unhappy business. From *him* we shall obtain advice and assistance at least, nay, I have little doubt but the fate of Stephen is, by this time, made known to him."

Matilda

Matilda lifted up her hand and eyes in grateful thankfulness for this benevolent proposal, and turning a timid look to the apartment which contained the corse of de Mowbray, "Perhaps, "too," she cried, as if hesitating to encrease the trouble Adela had yet to take on her account, while something like disgust arose in her bosom at the idea of an inmate so awful—"Perhaps, too, he will send some one "to remove that mournful object of"—"Ah, lady," exclaimed the interrupting Eda, "for the sake of the "Blessed Virgin, do insist upon the "Earl's sending or coming to take "away that shocking cause of my fears"—and, oh, that I may never sleep "here again—indeed I do not think I "ever shall—Poor murdered soul!—"No, I shall never forget him."

Regardless of this strange apostrophe, Lady de Warrenne left the cottage, while Eda continued to harass the languid spirits of her mistress with relating a thousand instances of supernatural appearances, and the restless attempts of perturbed souls, to discover to mortals the objects of their everlasting hate.

It was with infinite consternation that Adela understood from a servant of the Earl, that he quitted Gloucester on the preceding day, and, as was supposed, meant to return to Winchester—"You have, doubtless, heard, Madam," proceeded the ancient domestic, "that Stephen, the usurper, has been seized on the road by a party of spear-men, one of whom knowing him, although disguised, urged the others to the attack, and overpowered by superior force, he
" was

“ was taken, and carried, as was sup-
“ posed, towards Oxford.” “ *Then*
“ *he is alive,*” said Matilda, to whom
• Lady de Warrenne, on her return, re-
lated the event—“ Oh, pardon, pardon,
“ thou omniscient dispenser of unde-
“ served blessings, the weakness of a
“ creature who dared, even for one
“ instant, to question that providence
“ which has so frequently interfered to
“ the disappointment of our enemies—
“ He is *yet* alive, and *may* be once again
“ restored to the society of his friends,
“ and—oh, extatic thought! again be
“ the comfort and support of his Ma-
“ tilda—Forgive, dearest lady, the
“ seeming selfishness that thus appro-
“ priates the moments which should be
“ shared with a companion like thee,
“ but”——“ I do forgive, nay, ap-
“ plaud from my soul,” interrupted
Adela, “ these effusions of a pious
“ heart—and, oh, that it may be in-

“dulged in the grant of its most ex-
“tensive wishes. Surely the cause
“which once, from other motives, im-
“pelled me to hope its destruction,
“cannot be destitute of many adhe-
“rents, who, if they were acquainted
“with their monarch’s captivity,
“would strain every nerve to eman-
“cipate him. The citizens of Lon-
“don, however circumstances may in-
“duce them to temporize, are secret
“enemies to Maud; and the name
“and prudent government of Stephen
“are probably held in veneration by
“many who dare not openly avow
“their pretensions. At present, even
“Gloucester’s interference could not
“be requested with propriety, as he has
“already exceeded the limits which
“his ambitious sister would prescribe,
“although his *private* advice on the
“present occasion might be highly de-
“sirable—Is there no possibility, then,
my

“ my beloved friend of ”——“ *Possibility*,” said Matilda, arising, and then sinking as suddenly into her seat, “ oh, God, my brain is bursting with the variety of ideas your representation has aroused—What is Maud?—And what is her boasted right, that *she* should thus triumphantly persecute her equal in descent?—And, oh, how much her superior in every claim to universal respect—Madam, that inflexible woman has hitherto found *me* timid and submissive, and my noble consort generous, mild, and forgiving—but weak, emaciated, and powerless as I seem, she may chance to find the case reversed. You are surprised, Lady de Warrenne, at this effusion of a spirit ever desirous of conciliating, where it could be done without meanness; but where *all* is in danger, much must be hazarded—

“and it is *my* duty to seek the last resource when all others have failed.”

The glances which shot from her animated eyes—The glow that crimsoned her cheek—and the trembling of her weakened frame—all declared the purpose of a determined soul. It was the identical step that might lead to the accomplishment of Stephen's favourite hope, but the chances were greatly against it success.

“I guess,” cried Adela, (when Matilda ceased, which she then did more through inability than inclination) “I guess the noble sentiments which inform every speaking feature, and, oh, that it were in the power of Adela de Warrenne to ensure the success of her persecuted friends”—She then paused, as if conscious of the difficulty attending every attempt to assist

assist the imprisoned Stephen, for well she understood Matilda's meaning, from the impassioned language she had used—but in all the round of possibilities her ready imagination grasped at, and which crouded for examination, none offered of consequence sufficient to deserve notice.

De Evreux, like Earl Robert, while he both loved and pitied the royal unfortunates, abhorred every idea of restoring them to a crown which he conceived the property of another; nor was there but one baron whose integrity she could trust, to whom a safe application might be made, and *he* had formerly defended Maud's pretensions, till her unpopular manners, added to Stephen's courteous and wise demeanor, attached him entirely to that monarch. This baron was William, Lord Fitz-Alan; and as soon as his

name presented itself to her labouring memory, she expressively pronounced it — “Fitz-Alan,” cried the eager listener, “that name comprehends
“every thing—Fly to him, my excellent Adela, say—ah, tell him the
“great, the good Stephen must perish!
“—or at best drag on a life of hard
“captivity, unless he exerts himself for
“his release.” “Yes, Matilda, I go
“to seek him—and do you, my lovely
“queen, for are you not my queen?
“do you wait patiently the event;
“evening approaches, and when it is
“fully closed, two peasants will re-
“move one cause of our good Eda’s
“sufferings—the sad remains of John
“de Mowbray.”

It was not in the power of words to express the gratitude that marked the lovely mourner’s acceptance of these

these proposals—She wept in the arms of her charming benefactress, and eagerly pressed her to a bosom that palpitated with emotions various and contradictory.

CHAP.



CHAP. VII.

TO account for the absence of Robert of Gloucester, at a period so critical to the royal pair he had so assiduoufly protected, it will be necessary to say, that on the very morning of Stephen's departure, as the Earl was preparing to follow for the noble motive of again resigning himself into Winchester's custody, that he might be honourably liberated, a courier with dispatches from Geoffry, of Anjou, solicited for an immediate audience.

From

From a perusal of those dispatches, it appeared that Robert's presence in Normandy would be likely to produce some event in favour of young Henry's succession to the crown of England.

A host of objections to this request presented themselves with a force that almost defied opposition—Stephen was far from secure—His own honor, by protracting the day of his return to Winchester, would be impeached—Matilda was yet in danger—And Earl Robert determined upon refusing Plantagenet. Again he questioned the courier—Again referred to the papers before him. The interest of Maud—The claims of her son were named as entirely depending upon a personal negotiation—but the means were withheld from his knowledge—"A vessel," said the messenger, "waits to convey my lord from Pevensey in Sussex—"
"would

"would I could persuade him to attend the count; his presence is of the utmost consequence at Rouen." Gloucester's resolution was shaken— Could he render the Empress an essential service in the person of her son, much of that ill-will he reasonably expected on account of Stephen, would be done away; and as, at all events, he would immediately return, his parole (if such it were called) might be sacredly preserved.

These considerations were conclusive; and after commissioning a trusty servant with an account of his intended expedition to Lady de Warrenne, he directly began his journey.

The domestic, who waited the whole of that night for Adela, went back with the packet his lord entrusted him with, who, in case of accident, was told

to destroy it ; this, upon finding her so long absent, he foolishly did, from the fear of its being found upon him ; and thus were the anxious friends deprived of that consolation his lord's explanation would, doubtless have produced.

To the clear, pathetic, and just representation of Stephen and his comfort's cruel perplexities, Fitz-Alan granted his warmest attention. Lady de Warrenne, whom he almost venerated for her numerous excellences, and particularly for that courage which rendered her equal to the difficulties attending her friendly exertions, was delighted with the reception he gave her candid and artless tale ; and more so when he assured her, that the very *name* of their captured sovereign would act with indelible force upon *his* vassals ; and although he could not, while outwardly professing obedience

to

to the Empress, head the troops that were to emancipate her competitor, it should be his first care to provide a leader equal to himself in prowess, abilities, and interest with the soldiery.

That Stephen was fallen into his enemy's hands was a circumstance he had much lamented, nor was it any secret that, he was confined in the castle at Tunbridge. Sending, therefore, with his duteous commendations to Matilda, his opinion that she should by no means hazard any discovery of her existence to Maud, he added also his adjurations to her to be of good cheer; and faithfully promised no step should be neglected which might lead to the re-establishment of her consort.

Enchanted with the issue of this successful application, the good Adela with

with a due observance of the caution she used in her visits to the cottage, impatiently waited the approach of the following evening, that she might communicate to the anxious sufferer the hopes herself so eagerly encouraged.

To a relation so well calculated for the revival of every wish and expectation, Matilda gave an attention which seemed divided in its object—and while her eye was fixed on the earnest relater, her actions evinced a sort of joyful impatience to adopt some scheme in consequence of Lord Fitz-Alan's assurances.

Lady de Warrenne, who saw the restlessness with which this attention was accorded, went on, however, without interruption, till, on mentioning Fitz-Alan's intention of procuring a gallant leader of the forces which he
meant

meant to detach on Stephen's behalf, Matilda suddenly exclaimed, "a *leader*,
"Lady de' Warrenne, did he say—
"noble Fitz-Alan—I will obviate, as
"far as feminine courage can reach,
"that obstacle—The presence of a wo-
"man, connected by such powerful
"ligaments to the monarch they adore,
"may effect wonders—Return, then,
"thou inestimable support of the un-
"fortunate!—Oh, return, and tell the
"faithful baron, that Stephen's queen
"will lead his brave soldiers on to
"victory!"

Motionless with astonishment at a proposal so extraordinary, Adela could only gaze with encreasing wonder upon the fragile form and speaking features through which the energy of a glowing soul disseminated itself, till reflection upon the impossibility (as *she* deemed it) of accomplishing such an attempt, restored

restored the faculty of utterance ; and with a truly tender vehemence, she urged the inconsistency of it—" At least," she cried, " my dearest love, give one night's consideration to a subject so important." — Matilda blushed—The selfishness of a request thus made at the hazard of her Adela's safety crimsoned her cheek with shame—" *One night ?*" she cried, " oh, friend, forgive the cruelty of her who could dare propose to herself any gratification at such an expence—How can I look upon that pallid countenance, which fatigue has deprived of its healthy hue, and not sink with confusion at the idea of subjecting you to farther inconveniences ?—No, my Adela, we will dedicate this night, if possible, to calm repose—but, remember my resolution is unshaken—And again I repeat, *Matilda*" (here she again elevated her voice)—" Matilda,

“ tilda, through heaven’s interposition,
“ *shall* be the deliverer of her husband!
“ and heaven defend his right”——
“ *Matilda shall be the deliverer of her*
“ *husband.*”

Struck with this amazing repetition of her words, the astonished queen exclaimed, “ Lady de Warrenne, was it
“ you repeated my words?—It could
“ not be”—And then casting an eye of terror towards the inner apartment, from whence de Mowbray’s corpse was that day removed—“ It is a man’s
“ voice—Heaven protect us!—A war-
“ rior approaches.” “ Forgive this
“ rashness, cried a martial figure (as he advanced from the unclosed door, on which Matilda had rested an agonizing look) “ Know you not Fitz-
“ Alan?”—With a joyful sensation, Adela recognised the countenance of her noble friend, and listened to his
motives

motives for such an abrupt visit, and this he explained by declaring, " that
" conscious of the necessity of con-
" sulting those to whom he thought
" proper to delegate the important
" business of collecting his men, he
" immediately, upon Lady de War-
" renne's departure, applied himself
" to the execution of that purpose,
" and had happily effected it sooner
" than could be expected, as they ar-
" rived only the day preceding at
" Gloucester; and this welcome in-
" telligence he imagined might tend
" to the repose of his sovereign mistress,
" during the intervening hours. As
" to his reason for entering by that
" door, which led to another outlet
" from the cottage, and was left open
" by Eda, was merely to avoid any
" unnecessary disturbance — For Eda,
" who was employing herself in re-
" storing the little chamber to its usual
decent

“decent appearance—and who, in
“the occupation of her office, had
“not seen him enter.”

Matilda, when recovered from the transient effect of her surprise, welcomed this unexpected visitor with her usual grace; and before they separated it was determined that she should be conveyed to the spot where his troops would be in readiness to receive her—the bare sight of whom, Fitz-Alan concluded, would instigate them to the highest exertion of personal courage—“For me,” added he, “no course remains but
“that which may serve for the present
“to conceal my sentiments; and it
“must be my endeavour to give such
“a colour to the attempt as shall ex-
“culpate me from suspicion. Should
“Maud discover by any accidental
“means the spring from which
“Stephen’s recovered liberty shall
“arise

“ arise, it is in her power to mark with
“ sorrow every future hour of my ex-
“ istence, since Herbert Fitz-Alan, the
“ only prop of his father’s declining
“ life, is employed in a distinguished
“ situation near her person.” “ Enough,
“ my lord,” said Matilda, “ the heart
“ of a fond mother not only allows for
“ but applauds that tendernefs which is
“ the result of a gentle nature—Only
“ point out the time and manner of the
“ intended attack, and you will be en-
“ titled to Matilda’s grateful thanks,
“ and her comfort’s warmest services.”

Fitz-Alan then proposed that after the troops were assembled she should present herself before them, as confident of their protection and assistance—He then quitted her with an assurance of guarding her, under cover of the next evening to Tewksbury, where he

VOL. II. I hoped

hoped he should be able to find her a sufficient protector.

To Adela, whose imagination untouched by the enthusiastic warmth which gave to her friend's empassioned hopes the prospect of a complete deliverance, this arrangement teemed with a thousand difficulties, but as a calm disquisition would be combated with unopposable arguments, she could only resolve to accompany her, if possible, on this adventurous expedition, and leave the rest to an omnipotent providence.

Punctual to the night prefixed, Fitz-Alan, who had prepared several of his trusty friends to receive the amiable Matilda, with a sincere veneration, accompanied her to Tewksbury, where, by the time of their arrival, he hoped the forces would be assembled. But as the

the state of her health, which ill-ac-corded with the vigor of her spirit, forbade any extraordinary speed, he found his friends and vassals impatient for her presence.

The first glance Matilda caught of those who were confessedly collected to assist her lord, enflamed her struggling heart with a thousand different emotions. A— brilliant sun played on their armour; and in every countenance, near enough to be read, she beheld an expression of the truest loyalty.

Fitz-Alan, who dared not openly support this cause, after a pathetic farewell, delivered the lovely queen into the hands of those gallant adherents he had previously named to her as worthy of her fullest confidence, and withdrew to Gloucester, where his presence was necessary, to

counteract any reports his absence might have encouraged.

Adela, who had quitted the court under her usual pretence of visiting her country-seat, witnessed the cordial reception of her friend with a pleasure she could not conceal. The graceful figure, interesting attitude, and fascinating manners of Matilda wanted not the energy of her artless address to insure the favor of all who heard and saw her. The disguise she wore was insufficient to hide that expressive sweetness which animated her whole person; and she appeared before the admiring crowd as an angel pleading for its fellow excellence.

As the utmost privacy was to be observed respecting the destination of this little army, it was thought proper to detach it by different roads, and in small parties, to Tunbridge, when, suddenly collecting, they were to demand the
liberation

liberation of Stephen ; which, as it was to be made in the most hostile manner, they doubted not it would be successfully effected

Precipitate and wholly unprovided as to future contingencies, this arrangement carried the face of much difficulty in the estimation of the cool and dispassionate ; but Matilda saw nothing in the attempt that could check the high-raised hopes she now encouraged, till a distant view of the walls that enclosed her heart's dearest treasure, renewed, in a degree, the tender emotions by which her soul was usually governed ; but certain that upon *her* resolution depended much of the spirit her friends inhibited, she dashed off the starting tear, and with a smile which none but feeling souls could develope, pointed towards the castle, as it rose majestically over the town, and meandering sources of the

Medway—"Yonder," cried the agitated queen to those who were nearest, "yonder lies the scene of our wishes "and expectations—The enterprize is "arduous, but glorious—Advance, my "brave adherents, the pale dawn which "now sleeps upon those ramparts, will "every moment brighten, till the great "source of light shall re-animate this "solemn view—and, ah! like *his*, will "Stephen's influence be felt, admired, "and acknowledged, when the clouds "that now obscure his lustre shall fly "before your conquering hands; what "a poor weak woman *might* dare, *that* "would I do, and try at least to lead "you on to victory—Come, then, our "other friends approach—See, from that "wood, on our left, they issue—Yes, "Sir Hildebrand, they march deter- "mined, though composed."—Lady," replied the gallant veteran to whom she spoke, "you must retire—That
tender

“tender feeble form could not stand
“the din of war, the cries of the
“wounded, and the roughness of an
“assault, which will not yield to cere-
“mony or expostulation; the event is
“yet undecided, and should our pro-
“gress be marked with death, the scene
“would overpower thy noble yet de-
“licate spirit—Retire, then, lady, to
“that cottage which peeps above those
“stunted oaks in the valley, to our
“right—it will not be long, I trust, ’ere
“this suspense will be over.”

Adela, who had accompanied her favourite to Tunbridge, now added her softest persuasions to Sir Hildebrand’s more forcible expostulations; and the reluctant Matilda, who could not oppose the truths they advanced, slowly quitted her gallant host, while she derived some little comfort from the idea that she should not only be in the way

of hearing the earliest intelligence, but near enough to receive her beloved lord immediately on his emancipation.

The rest which long travelling and a debilitated frame would necessarily require, was not, however, coveted by this exemplary wife—"A few, a very
" few hours, my dearest friend, and it
" will be settled whether I shall ever
" know, in future, the blessings of repose ; here, at this casement, I can
" watch that event which engrosses
" every faculty of my soul—Sleep, then,
" dear Adela, and permit *me* to enjoy,
" undisturbed, those reflections an un-
" quiet mind encourages."

This reply to Lady de Warrenne's kind remonstrances, was unanswerable ; and Matilda was suffered to pursue her own inclination.

Although

Although no visible sign of an attack appeared in that part of the castle which the cottage window commanded, our lovely heroine was convinced from the repeated shouts and confused noises, as they were borne upon the air, that her friends were not idle. But when those sounds totally ceased, and she could perceive no traces of the success, she panted, for her agitation became intolerable—"He is lost, my Adela," she cried, "—I shall never more behold my worshipped Stephen!—Our friends are taken or destroyed!—And Matilda's portion must now be that of the bitterest anguish!"

A poor cottager (to whom this little dwelling belonged) now burst in with every mark of fear upon his countenance, and without knowing the quality of his guests, urged them to go, if possible, from thence, as a party of soldiers

who were descending the hill to the south, seemed to be marching thither, and he could not answer for the safety of two females should they be discovered. Lady de Warrenne would have answered the peasant, but a sudden shriek from Matilda induced her to turn about, and she beheld her in the arms of Stephen !

To paint a meeting so unexpected, so eagerly desired, and so rapturously enjoyed by these illustrious unfortunates, is beyond the powers of a simple historian; suffice it to say, that it justified, in every loyal heart, the steps by which this happy meeting had been procured, and the noble warriors who accompanied their sovereign to the cottage, rejoiced with a sincerity that amply supplied the smoothness of adulation, which is too often the substitute for nobler qualities.

It

It was with infinite astonishment that Matilda attended to Sir Hildebrand's account of the morning's event, who briefly informed her, that, in consequence of his demand to see the governor of the castle, he was civilly admitted to that nobleman's presence, when, upon his peremptory demand for their royal prisoner, the governor withdrew, and immediately returned, leading Stephen from an inner apartment, nor made the smallest opposition to the motion Sir Hildebrand made to convey him from the castle, the balium of which was then filled with his warlike followers; and this appearance he supposed accounted for the facility of Stephen's departure, whose confinement being generally known, and as generally lamented by the town's people, made any attempt to continue it extremely hazardous, at a moment too when their hopes of seeing him at liberty would be strengthened and supported by the presence of an

army confessedly collected to give him freedom.

As the troops by whom Stephen had been conveyed to his place of confinement were secretly instructed by Trapanti, it may not be amiss to say that his emissaries had been too successfully employed in tracing him from the cottage; and although ignorant of the particular circumstances which attended his abode there, saw enough to convince them he was in the very act of flying to Winchester. Immediately, therefore, and with a courage worthy of a better cause, they set upon the monarch's escort, and forcing him from them, made forced marches towards Tunbridge, the governor of whose castle was a creature of Trapanti's. And here the life of his prisoner was to have fallen a sacrifice to the most infernal barbarity, but the tool of that accomplished villain could

could find no opportunity to put his sanguine resolution in practice, as the warders, and those whose concurrence was necessary to the infernal business, were, to a man, the friends of Stephen; and thus was the devoted king preserved by the very means Trapanti employed to destroy him.

While these extraordinary events were passing in England, Earl Robert, who found his presence in Normandy incompetent to the business for which he had been summoned, prepared to return and surrender himself to the legate, with whom he hoped to find the excellent pair for whom he had endured so much, and arrived at Winchester in the third week after Stephen and his consort reached that place.

Lady de Warrenne, it should be observed, had in the interim renewed her attendance

attendance on Maud, who, she was happy to find, was still ignorant of the late proceedings, and this might be accounted for in the reluctance Trapanti's emissaries expressed to inform him of their defeat.

It should be likewise noticed, that Earl Robert, stunned by a recital which Adela gave him of the late occurrences, scarcely knew whether to rejoice at or regret them. The description she gave him of Matilda's weakness and her husband's continued ill-health, which fatigue and confinement had occasioned, revived several disagreeable even mournful remembrances; and absorbed in painful contemplations, Gloucester passed the tedious hours of his slow return to Winchester.

The acknowledgments which Matilda's gratitude dictated, was as a pang
of

of retrospection to his noble heart; constant in its nature, and regulated by the sentiments of a well-governed soul, it suffered not the cloud of oblivion to rest upon its earliest hopes and prospects. The distress of its once lovely possessor renewed the bitter emotions of regret; and when he beheld her sick, emaciated, and deprived of every youthful grace, (for she had nearly sunk under her late extraordinary exertions) a heavy sigh accompanied the reflection that in *his* protection she might still have bloomed an object of admiration instead of pity. Not so, thought the fond and tender consort of her adored Stephen, once more the companion and solace of his misfortunes, *she* could have endured much heavier evils than any the most fertile imagination had then the smallest reason to suggest; and while her eye beamed extatic delight on the subject of almost every thought and wish, a tear extorted

extorted by the view of his fragile figure, checked its reviving brilliancy.

The thanks and profuse expressions of Winchester, when he beheld Earl Robert, who, notwithstanding the late events, he considered as their ultimate protector and deliverer, were unbounded, while he received them with the retiring modesty of a noble spirit—But when the artful prelate attempted by the smoothest blandishments and most powerful rhetoric to seduce the uncorrupted Robert from his firm allegiance, every band of amity was broken between them, and he scrupled not to express, in terms of the sincerest indignation, his abhorrence of such principles—“I have,” cried this spirited loyalist “already exceeded the
“bounds of rectitude in attempting to
“restore a dangerous pretender to his
“liberty, and empowered him to make
“head against a throne which Glou-
“cester

“ cester would *die* to protect—Of the
“ two evils which the present situation
“ of things offered to my choice, I have
“ ventured the least; and although the
“ well-meant enterprize succeeded not,
“ yet, by another agency, your brother
“ is freed from prison and from death—
“ We *may* meet in the field, and if, as
“ the foe to our cause, he will engage
“ Earl Robert on very different terms,
“ *then* let him guard well that life I
“ would have so recently protected—As
“ a fellow-creature suffering under un-
“ justifiable severities he was entitled
“ to my active commiseration—but”—
(here even Robert’s equanimity for-
sook him) “ but as the promoter of
“ dissention—the claimant of a crown he
“ inherits not—The infringer upon
“ national prerogatives—And the vio-
“ lator of our sacred liberty, I defy
“ him even to the death—And, oh, that
“ the sentiments of *true* patriotism, not
that

“ that which falsely separates the in-
“ terest of prince and people, could in-
“ fluence succeeding generations, how
“ much misery would an observation
“ of them spare to ages yet unborn—
“ I see, my lord, you are ready to set
“ my sister’s mistaken conduct against
“ this assertion, but can the faults of an
“ individual change the tendency of a
“ doctrine which the united attempts of
“ erring beings can never effectively
“ destroy—It is not the influence of frail
“ mortality can change or deface the
“ beauty of moral virtue ; what I cannot
“ remedy I may and *do* lament ; but that
“ would be no excuse for a criminal
“ neglect or tame submission to disorders
“ which justice commands my best at-
“ tempts to oppose and eradicate—
“ Adieu, then, my lords, *I* have acted
“ independently and disinterestedly,
“ *go ye and do likewise*”—So saying, he
“ withdrew, leaving Winchester ba-
“ lancing

lancing whether his decided defiance demanded praise or blame. But Stephen, in whose thankful heart every generous passion prompted to veneration and love, could scarcely forbear resigning, during that empassioned moment, those pretensions which this noble pleader for the rights of a haughty sister had nearly persuaded him not to assert.

While the emancipated pair were receiving and participating in the felicitations their generous friend had candidly rejoiced in, from motives in which the cold-hearted policy of a selfish heart took no share, and which militated not against the principles his loyal soul had so recently given vent to, *he* could look to nothing but the certainty of unjust reproach — and authorised by Winchester's stipulated consent, returned to his native city ; and, on the evening of his

his arrival again, sought the presence of her who, from the present circumstances, obtained a plausible though unjust superiority. Of Trapani he could hear nothing, although his orders respecting the Cardinal's being permitted to return unmolested in three days after Earl Robert's departure was punctually observed by that nobleman's trusty assistants ; but as the consequence of the fray occasioned a still longer confinement, there was reason to suppose the real cause was carefully concealed.

Lady de Warrenne had again resumed her attendance upon her royal mistress, and was in waiting when Gloucester appeared. The encouraging look she gave him upon his entrance, reconciled in a degree the awkwardness of a first encounter. But the mind of Maud had undergone an unexpected revolution ; and the representations of her
estimable

estimable companion, added to the absence of her pernicious and artful adviser, left little for Earl Robert to apprehend. She received him with all the sincerity of sisterly attention, and even hinted that, situated as he was, no other resource remained than that he had chosen, confessing in the moment of humiliation and revived affection, that mis-led by Trapanti's counsels and artful management, she had nearly, though ignorantly, consented to the assassination of the *usurper* (for so she stiled her generous and much injured competitor).

By this acknowledgment, her brother guessed she was acquainted with the Cardinal's disappointment, and *his* prior and subsequent conduct respecting Count Stephen; but of every incident relating to Matilda, the Empress's total silence on that head convinced him she
was

was ignorant, and with his accustomed prudence, he forbore to mention her.

Before the Earl had retired from an audience which produced the highest satisfaction a still beloved sister could bestow, she solicited his advice and assistance in all those instances where his services might be useful, particularly as to the steps she ought to take to repossess herself of a crown which at present seemed balancing between two contending powers; and Earl Robert, delighted with the pliancy of her disposition, promised his faithful attention to her wishes.

Sir William de Evreux, whose confinement she now appeared to lament, was added to her small stock of counsellors; and if ever Maud had it in her power to rectify past mistakes, or redeem

deem lost opportunities, *this* had been the time for such a gratification.

Already terms, such as the yet remaining pride of a Maud and Gloucester's prudent policy could suggest, were preparing for Stephen's inspection; and several weeks had established in the Earl's opinion his sister's claim to moderation. Lady de Warrenne became the chosen friend of her heart; and during a short excursion her brother made to London, she professed to admit no male companion but de Evreux.

The freedom which Adela manifested in her occasional visits to Maud's cabinet, prevented the ceremony of annunciation; and one evening, recollecting a circumstance she had forgotten to communicate, she presently returned to mention it, when, beholding through the half-closed door the figure of a
man,

man, who that instant was advancing by another entrance, she would have retreated, but every faculty of her soul was struck with astonishment when she beheld, as he turned to address the Empress, the features of her dangerous adviser, *Trapanti*!—*Trapanti* at liberty, and received by Maud without any apparent indignation, in the absence too of Earl Gloucester, who can express the sentiments Adela encouraged at this horrid proof of the Cardinal's persisted in villainy?—For Stephen no apprehensions distressed her gentle heart; *he* was beyond the machinations of his opponents—But the Earl, (by whom *Trapanti* had been severely wounded) who had traversed his schemes, and braved the effects of his utmost malice, *he* thought Lady de Warrenne is now the mark for treachery to expend its poisoned shafts upon.

Her

Her only resource in this exigence was the good de Evreux—But it was night; and the impatient lady counted the tedious hours as they elapsed, till the rising sun informed her she might be admitted with propriety to her faithful adviser. Attended, therefore, by a trusty domestic, she passed the long galleries and covered works of the castle to Sir William's apartments, which, as an officer of the household, were appointed for his use within the precincts of Maud's residence. Here she was informed the knight was not stirring; and was entreated to wait a few minutes till his chamberlain should announce her.

Desirous to remain undiscovered, she permitted another man, who was accidentally passing, to summons his master; who immediately returning, exclaimed, "that the knight was no
" where to be found—that his mattress

“ was dragged from its frame, and that
“ by the appearance of blood on the
“ floor, on which lay scattered several
“ of his venerable locks, there was
“ no doubt but his dear master was
“ murdered !”

Shocked beyond the powers of recollection, Adela fainted at this dreadful description, and was carried in a state of insensibility to the Empress's chamber, by whose door she must have passed to her own.

Surprised at the disorder of her unhappy friend, Maud ordered the men to support her to a chair ; and then set herself to restore the sinking sufferer, who no sooner recovered the power of articulation, than she groaned, in tremulous accents, the word “ *murder !*” adding to it the names “ *Trapanti and de Evreux.*” The Empress waited, in fearful terror, an explanation

planation of this awful suggestion; and Lady de Warrenne, with a greater degree of anguish continued—"Infernal arts!—Diabolical cruelty!—Oh, lady, vengeance is at work!—Gloucester—The gallant Gloucester!—save him!—forwarn him!—The powers of darkness are again let loose—The fiend of destruction has vowed revenge, and he will keep his word!"—"Why this is madness," cried Maud, "of what does your mistress speak, Ellena?—What has occasioned"—She was going on when the supposed assassination of Sir William was announced by his esquire, who rushed in with the intelligence of his master's absence, and the grounds there were for the most terrible suspicions. The Empress sighed, and paced the room in apparent agitation; but somewhat recovering her usual dignity, she commanded the strictest

search to be made for the perpetrators of such an abhorred act, and denounced signal retribution against the prompters of it.

Scarcely was Lady de Warrenne revived to a thorough sense of the loss she had sustained, and communicated her doubts respecting the melancholy fate of so brave a man, than Cardinal Trapanti was openly introduced—"He had heard of the *infernal catastrophe*," (so he named it) "and was come to offer his best services for the development of the treacherous business; but who," he added, (with all the warmth of friendship) "who could hesitate a moment to criminate the usurper and his colleagues, as involved in the detestable plot—Sir William was a friend to his Empress and the glorious constitution of England, of course, then, his destruction

“tion was an object to the opposite
“parties; and were *he* to advise, it
“should be for the return of Earl
“Robert, whose indefatigable prudence
“would soon trace the matter to its
“source.” “True,” observed Lady
de Warrenne, “and to his *own* de-
“struction—Gloucester is safe where
“he is, *but here*”——She ceased; and
fixed a look at Trapanti which forced
upon his sickly countenance a mo-
mentary flush. But conscious of past
villainy, he smothered the indignant
reply which passion prompted.

Maud, however, had no such motive
for passive silence—*She* was distressed,
bewildered and suspicious, but of
whom?—And where to look for an
explanation of Adela’s broken and
incongruous sentences was beyond her
power, as that lady refused any pre-
sent explanation.

It was too certain that Trapani had renewed his footing in her good opinion, by giving a plausible reason for his motive in attempting to remove Stephen; and had nearly contrived, during Earl Robert's absence, to throw a successful stigma upon his recent transactions—But Adela's visible dislike of the Cardinal, and the pains she had formerly taken to set his character in its true light, added to her own unfulfilled integrity, and the present shocking hints she had thrown out, shook once more the foundation of the priest's hopes; and he withdrew in a state of mortification, doubt, and disappointment.

The news of Sir William's cruel attack soon reached an ear ever open to the call of friendship; and pierced a heart which loved and respected his valuable qualities. Gloucester, therefore,

fore, with a lightning-like speed, posted from London, determined to perform what Trapanti only proposed.

His first business was to search every dark avenue of the castle, every disused, damp, and gloomy cellar, omitting not even to turn up the humid earth of those dreary recesses; but no discovery followed his eager exploration, and, as the last resource, he examined the floor and wainscot of his bed-chamber. In all this he was assisted by two chamberlains, who forgot not the broad and spacious chimney as a possible means of concealing a dead body.

Grieved at the fruitlessness of his efforts, Earl Gloucester was turning to leave the room, when a dark closet, on the left hand, tempted him to look in. It was spacious, and lined with

the same kind of oak wainscoting as the chamber. Here Earl Robert was struck by the same appearance of blood, and hoary locks as the bedroom exhibited—"Did you see," said he, (addressing a chamberlain) "these symptoms before?"—"Why, no—" "No—I can't say as I did."—"Nor *you, Retroni?*"—"Me?—No, sure—" "No—See—Me—Me"—"Villain," cried the Earl, (collaring Retroni, who had formerly been in Trapanti's suit) "*you*, at least, are no stranger to this detestable business—Speak!—" "Say where the reverend remains are, "I have marked your manners from the moment I began my search, nor need those pallid looks and shaking limbs to assure me of your guilt"—"Oh, no sword, master," cried the trembling wretch, "and you shall know all." Gloucester instantly sheathed the terrifying weapon, while
Retroni

Retroni went on to say, "that his
" former occupation had been that of
" a bravo at Naples ; but that, in con-
" sequence of a considerable reward
" he had obeyed Trapanti's instruc-
" tions to quit that place and join the
" Cardinal in England, whose first
" employment for him was to assassi-
" ate Count Stephen"—" But *de*
" *Evreux*," cried the impatient Glou-
cester, " how has *he* been disposed of ?
" And where is his precious body ?"

Retroni informed him that the act had
been committed in that closet, between
the hours of two and three in the
morning, whither Thomas (who, in
Earl Robert's eager attempt to secure
the Neapolitan was permitted to es-
cape) and himself had dragged him ;
that his resistance was astonishing ; and
that he fell while calling upon Glou-
cester for help. He then went to a door
in the wainscot which opened upon a

flight of steps that led to a sort of reservoir, and opening it, said they had tumbled his body into that water, from whence, on the following night, they carried it into the court of the castle, and by removing some of the pavement, under which it was deposited, they effectually concealed it from discovery. "Yet," said the Earl, "you could not suppose these horrid marks of violence would not lead to questions of a dangerous nature? To this he was answered, that there was no reason to imagine any one would visit the apartment so early in the morning; and that the man who was commissioned by Lady de Warrenne was not in the secret, and although Thomas attempted to stop him at the head of the stairs, he saw enough to convince them of the business. Retroni likewise thought it better that those indications of violence should remain

remain after having once been seen, than by officiously attempting to remove them, to incur a suspicion which they justly deserved.

As this confession so amply criminated Trapani, the Earl wished to bring the dreadful charge home to him, but in what way he could not readily determine; and after seeing the assassin properly secured, and issuing the strictest orders for Thomas being pursued, he went to the Empress with a full intention of impeaching her once confided-in favourite. But on entering the cabinet where she was accustomed to exhibit the shadow (for it hardly admitted a better signification) of royal authority, in hearing causes and giving audience, his usual patience and caution nearly deserted the generous Gloucester, upon observing, in all the effrontery of unsuspected

K 6

guilt,

||

guilt, the detestable Trapanti, who, seated at Maud's right hand, appeared to cast a look of defiance upon his noble opponent.

As he approached his sister, it was too evident to him the Cardinal had once more succeeded in his attempt on Maud's credulity, a weakness which had but little influence on her disposition, and required all Trapanti's artful eloquence to compass; and it immediately occurred to Gloucester, that nothing short of absolute detection would remove the veil his cunning representations had thrown over a tolerably clear understanding. Waving, therefore, any present attack, he contented himself with totally neglecting the exulting Cardinal; and heard, with seeming indifference, the Empress's invitation to Trapanti and himself to take their dinner with her,
on

on the following day, in the banquet-hall, where she expected to meet many of the wealthiest adherents to her declining cause.

This was an opportunity not to be neglected by Gloucester—The hall windows which reached nearly to the level of the floor, looked upon the fatal spot that concealed the murdered knight's remains—And this arrangement directly suggested a plan which he conceived would fully elucidate the yet concealed mystery of base treachery—"Yes," cried the Cardinal, (in a tone at once sarcastic and triumphant, although he meant it should imply nothing more than a wish to conciliate past grievances) "and there
"in flowing goblets of generous wine,
"my Lord of Gloucester and the Em-
"press shall drown all animosity with
"their favoured visitor, Trapanti."
"True,

"True, Lord Cardinal," answered the Earl, (whose knowledge of depraved human nature was not sufficient to develop the suddenness of a change from confessed haughtiness to the pliability of assumed gentleness) "true, and there too, perhaps, *my* motives for the animosity you hint at may be"—"Excused, my brother, is it not so?—Yes, I shall there witness a coalition which may restore these realms to their pristine glory." Trapanti smiled; but the treacherous signal was meant to cover the depravity of a heart exulting in the hope of new victories—And kissing Maud's hand, he felicitated her on the prospect of seeing these mighty events accomplished.

CHAP.



CHAP. VIII.

RESOLVED to grace the intended festival with every splendid and luxurious decoration, Maud devoted the intervening hours to giving and seeing those orders punctually executed, which so short a space would admit of.

A gallery, extending over the entrance, was hung with the richest silks for the purpose of containing Trappanti's band, which, since his exile, had

had joined him in England ; and were meant, by their sweet and melodious tones to relieve the sonorous clang of English drums and trumpets. At the upper end of the hall was raised a small table, surmounted by a canopy of the most gorgeous texture for the accommodation of Maud, her brother, and the Cardinal ; a circumstance which extremely disgusted her loyal barons, who were unused to have an *Italian* priest placed above them—Nor could the gentle de Warrenne see an enemy so bitter as she still conceived Trapanti to be, thus fatally encouraged ; and every decoration she beheld of flowers, massive plate, and stately hangings, seemed to her prophetic and gloomy forebodings, more like pompous funeral ornaments than the grand pageantry of festive entertainments ; while Maud, in her contemplation of the glorious exhibition,

saw

saw in it only a renewal of her former greatness.

Gratified by the distinction paid to him on this new occasion, Trapanti (for whom the company waited) seated himself between the Empress and her brother; and the dinner hours passed with a conviviality no one truly enjoyed but the Empress. Gloucester appeared thoughtful, perplexed, and almost inattentive to the barons pointed attention to *him*, as the exclusive sharer of their undivided homage, not once regarding the Cardinal's smiling appeal for equal respect; while their notice of Maud was cold, constrained, and barely dutious, which, in the fullness of her heart, she cheerfully accepted.

The ostentation of Trapanti's first appearance seemed now to lose its support

port, for in the barons decided neglect he read a thousand motives for their dislike; and apparently to cover this deserved mortification, he pushed about the goblet with an eagerness that denoted his wish to escape reflection, several of which were quickly emptied; when, calling to one of his own attendants, he commanded him to fetch some Falernian wine, of a peculiar exquisite flavor. The man immediately produced it, setting a goblet before each of the convivial set. Maud, disrelishing the intemperance of her guest, refused the offered libation; but this was disregarded by Trapani, who, filling a goblet, pressed the Earl to pledge him, while he drank "oblivion to every recent feud." To this, Gloucester made no objection, only adding his wish that the claims of innocent and guilty might be effectually settled.

The

The Cardinal who, in the inebriation of the moment had not involved the faculty of discrimination, gazed confusedly on the Earl, as if to demand an explanation of such a wish; but Robert, whose plot was ripe for discovery, quitted the table, and stepping to the barons, as they were seated near the windows, calmly told them "the assailants of their lamented de Evreux were known, and his place of burial acknowledged."

This intelligence so coolly delivered, and so plainly expressed, while it awoke in every bosom a glowing curiosity, reached the ears of Trapanti, and he joined the company, as if desirous to catch the pleasing information—"Yes," rejoined the Earl, (pointing to the court) "beneath yon stones lies the murdered de Evreux; those men are now employed in removing
"the

“ the pavement; come, my lords, I
“ see the business is almost done, we
“ will witness the mournful ceremony
“ of recovering the revered remains
“ from their ignominious grave, and
“ deposit them in a more sacred re-
“ cefs.” So saying, they left the hall
to Maud and the Cardinal, whose as-
pect expressed a mixture of malice,
fear, and latent triumph—“ Is it pos-
“ sible,” cried the Empress, (trembling
with excessive apprehension) “ that my
“ brother has *indeed* discovered the
“ perpetrators of that barbarous—ah,
“ ’tis indeed so, look, my Lord Car-
“ dinal, they bear his body hither.”
Trapanti caught her hand as she was
shrinking from the horrid sight (as the
body was, at that moment, placed on
the floor before her) and begged her
to retire. This she was extremely
ready to do; but Gloucester, who
guessed the motive which actuated him
to

to accompany her) entreated Trapanti would wait a moment, as *his* testimony might be of use in the elucidation before them. "Impossible, my Lord," returned he, "*my* services have been already employed and accepted for the purpose of tracing the cause of this lamented death, but to *me* it has remained an impenetrable secret; Of what moment then can be *my* testimony?"—"Where nothing is known, nothing can be expected."—"Granted, sir—Yet, surely, the benevolence which has been so active, must be gratified in the prospect we now have of a full explanation of the shocking transaction."

Conscious that any farther contradiction might produce unwelcome consequences, Trapanti consigned his agitated charge to the care of her attendants, and with an ill-supported
bravery

bravery, advanced to gaze on the disfigured corse; but the momentary contemplation this awful sight suggested, was soon interrupted by Earl Robert, who, in a pensive attitude, his arms folded over his breast, and disregarding the friendly tear which rolled over his burning cheek, slowly cast his eyes upwards, and again leveling them to the surrounding company, rested an indignant and penetrating glance upon Trapanti; while the solemn silence of every individual marked this mournful scene with additional horror.

At length, the Earl, with an impressive and steady voice (while his eye reverted to the pale object before him) addressed the attentive barons—
“ You see, my lords,” he cried, “ in
“ this poor pale victim an instance of
“ that depravity to which human nature
“ ture

“ture *can* descend—This gallant knight
“was *my* friend—He was the friend of
“the oppressed—The scourge of the
“vicious—And *therefore* he fell!—
“Noble de Evreux,” continued the
apostrophizing Robert, “had’st thou
“fallen in the field of battle thine end
“had been glorious; or were those
“wounds inflicted by a generous
“enemy, the tear they might have
“excited would have embalmed them
“—But the poignard of an assassin,
“wrote in dark and bloody charac-
“ters, the infernal inclination of a
“vile heart!—Look, my estimable
“companions, at the violence done
“to this hallowed frame—The crown
“of age was torn by cruel and relent-
“less hands from the sacred head!—
“Poor mutilated veteran, could not
“these furrowed lines, the sunken eye,
“the weight of fourscore years pro-
“tect thee?”—A burst of tears inter-
rupted the effusions of his generous
soul,

foul, while his representation, like that of Anthony over the corse of Julius Cæsar, seemed to kindle, alternately, the passions of pity and revenge in his auditors—"I may be to blame," he resumed, "to lament an injury which calls for immediate vengeance! But, my friends, should I be more explicit, you must consent to wait the forms of law for retribution—It is true, I have in my eye the prompter, the instigator of this atrocious villainy."

Aghast with terror, each baron turned a fearful and exploring look upon his neighbour, as if eager to catch from the suspicious countenance a gleam of information; but dark and impenetrable was that which strove to conceal the guilty secret; and Earl Robert found that all his endeavours could not forward a candid confession

"My

“ My lords,” repeated he — “ The
“ monster, yet unappalled by this af-
“ fecting sight, now makes one of my
“ numerous auditors ” — “ Name him,”
cried the Cardinal, with a voice em-
boldened by desperation — “ *Trapanti!*
“ *Trapanti!* ” echoed the astonished
barons — “ Cardinal Trapanti ! ” — “ Ay,
“ lords,” answered Earl Robert — “ *He,*
“ whose *services* have been *employed* in
“ tracing the origin of this pernicious
“ mischief—Yes, lord Cardinal, *you* are
“ the sole cause—the spring—the inven-
“ tor of it ; and upon the ground of a
“ just accusation, I charge *you* as a per-
“ nicious, though concealed enemy, to
“ England, and *all* her rights—nor yet
“ less so to our sovereign and her com-
“ petitor.”

Deprived of every power of self-de-
fence, Trapanti could only tremulously
pronounce the words — “ Prove your
VOL. II. L “ assertions ”

“affertionss”—“*I will,*” cried Gloucester—“Approach, Retroni.” As if dreading immediate condemnation from the very sight of this witness, the culprit sunk on a bench behind him, and covering his face with his robe, exhibited an appearance of convicted guilt; while Retroni, little less agitated than his employer, made shift to inform the horror-struck audience of the particulars already related, and subjoined to this black account the motive which induced his lord to destroy Sir William—and this, he said, was owing to his discovering the active part he had taken in Stephen’s affairs; and, added to all, he charged the Cardinal with an intention to involve Earl Gloucester in the sanguine revenge.

Scarcely had Retroni concluded his accusation, when Ralph Lord Lovel, William Mohun, and Geoffry Talbot (in whose features the workings of indignant

dignant vengeance were terrible) exclaimed as with one voice—"Down with the villain"—and flying on their helpless prey, would have sacrificed him that moment to the manes of their honored friend, and as much to secure their beloved Earl from his future designs, had not the latter rushed in to preserve the devoted Cardinal. "My lords," cried he—"desist"—*Your* swords demand "much nobler victims—Fear not for *me*, "nor think Italian policy can reach *my* "life—He is now amenable to the insulted laws: and to the execution of "those laws we will refer him."

Those eyes, which but one instant before were shut in breathless expectation of his fate, now glared upon his deliverer with an expression too intricate for delineation; while a smile, the characteristic of Trapanti's feelings, quivered on his parched lips, and he convulsively

gasped for utterance. At length he articulated—"What—still composed—No marks of—And has Trapanti failed—No—Gloucester, you save *my* life; for what to rejoice in my future ignominious exit—Poor mistaken man—No triumph awaits thee of that description."

A sudden paleness, the fore-runner of excessive giddiness, called the barons attention from the Cardinal to their beloved Earl Robert. "'Tis nothing my friends," cried the half-fainting nobleman—"An impetus of the perturbed brain—It already abates." At this courageous assertion, Trapanti again smiled; but the eyes of every one were now attracted by a new and affecting object, Lady de Warrenne—who entering with a wild distracted air, ran up to Gloucester, and gazing pitiously upon him, just breathed the word—"Poison!"—and sunk at his feet. "Poison!" repeated
Geoffry

Geoffry Talbot, who caught at the word as if it conveyed an instantaneous conviction—" *Poison*—and administered by " this monster." The signal was effectual; and the next moment beheld Trapani nearly breathless at the feet of his furious assailants, while every sword contributed a stroke to the utter extinction of a worthless existence.

As soon as the bloody scene was completed, Earl Robert, who had ineffectually attempted to save his supposed murderer, expressed in high and angry terms his sense of this premature violence, and even accused his friends of injustice, in thus accelerating a sentence which a vague suspicion had wrested from the legal powers—But the trembling voice, and encreasing debility of this son of honor, was a sufficient excuse which established itself in every bosom for the precipitated vengeance.

When Lady de Warrenne, who had recovered to congratulate herself on the death of so base a culprit, now retired with her lamented friend to Maud's apartment, she told the cause of her suspicions—which was, “That the wine Earl Robert
“ had drank of, being removed by a servant, he asked the Italian domestic to
“ join in emptying the goblet; that the
“ latter, after holding it carefully against
“ the light, demanded from whence it
“ was taken; and being informed it was
“ the remnant of that which the Earl had
“ drank, he dashed it furiously against
“ the wall—This occasioned much confusion, and Leoni was called upon to
“ declare his motives for such a conduct.
“ The fellow replied, while he trembled
“ excessively, that he did not think, from
“ all he knew, that the Cardinal was well
“ treated by Lord Gloucester—and
“ the thoughts of this made him detest
“ even the vessel he had put to his lips.”

An

An excuse so futile could only effect its purpose on the ignorant creatures for whom it was fabricated; and Adela's waiting damsel, who saw and heard the whole transaction, immediately reported it to her lady. This was ground enough for Lady de Warrenne's imagination to work upon—Already, so justly prejudiced as she was against Trapani, and maddening with the most direful suggestions, she rashly, though generously flew to the hall in a sort of hope, that if it *were* so, it might not be yet too late to apply an antidote—Although in Gloucester's mental censure of this business, he could not pass by its noble motive, he yet calmly cautioned her against such excessive sensibility in future—and positively declared he could entertain no such improbable opinion; assuring the Empress, who was seriously shocked by Adela's representation, that he was entirely recovered, and that the disorder he felt could only be

attributed to the disturbance of a mind so cruelly depressed by the awful scene he was engaged in.

Somewhat satisfied with this declaration, Maud reverted to Trapanti's miserable exit, and expressed in the most candid terms her sorrow for being so artfully duped by that abandoned wretch; and even hinted a wish to make such terms with Stephen, as should confirm to her beloved son, Henry, the future possession of a crown, whose weight began to be past endurance.

Earl Robert saw not in this sudden and astonishing proposal the conflict of a pride wounded in almost every direction, nor guessed it was partly the result of her certain conviction of the danger which necessarily attached to her present situation, which from Stephen's entire liberation

liberation, and his encreasing influence became every day more alarming.

It is true, that supported by Cardinal Trapanti's assurance of even foreign assistance to establish her wishes, she had too freely given the reins to a fervid imagination, nor once considered how incongruous it was, to expect from an exile, that protection which he could not secure even to himself. But the delusion was at an end. *His* vile and atrocious act had met with condign punishment—and the fall of that glittering meteor, which so long dazzled her abused senses, restored the calm and steady lustre of her brother's virtues to its original brilliancy.

Ever eager to catch at, and improve every gleam of moderation and prudence in his sister's disposition, Gloucester proposed an arrangement of one

of several plans which he presented to her for her consideration, but the leading feature of each was, that he should accompany her to Winchester, under the idea that from a personal audience much more might be obtained than from any secondary influence — Proposing at the same time, that during her negotiation with Stephen and his brother she should reside at the Monastery, to whose superior Maud had been, in some measure, indebted for a temporary asylum.

Maud felt a pang of recollection at this part of his proposition, that gave birth to some very unpleasant ideas. The Chapel—The monument—The figure, so wonderfully removed, again occurred to memory. But Gloucester was now her sole counsellor, adviser, and earthly guide ; nor would she in any one instance step beyond the line he drew, or militate against his slightest suggestions.

To

To Father Andrew, then, a message was dispatched; and Lady de Warrenne agreed to accompany her royal mistress to Winchester, as soon as Stephen could be apprised of their intention.



CHAP. IX.

THE abhorrence which all ranks and degrees of people had conceived against Trapanti's barbarous assassination of Sir William de Evreux, effectually shielded the inflictors of that bad man's punishment from legal notice. Retroni was tried and condemned in the most public manner; and Thomas, unable to escape the vigilance of his pursuers, suffered with him on the same scaffold.

Notwith-

Notwithstanding the spirit and activity which Earl Robert exhibited in the management of those affairs which came under his cognizance, the Empress beheld, with a truly sisterly concern, that both his strength and looks were visibly effected—the latter assuming a cadaverous hue ; while the former rapidly declined.

Still Adela, who could not overcome her suspicions of foul play, persisted in the horrid ideas she had first taken up ; but as no proof could be deduced from outward circumstances, she found it necessary to smother, in future, the forebodings of a generously-sensible heart. It seemed as if the noble Earl encouraged (if not the same notions) some not wholly dissimilar to her's, as no increasing debility, no entreaties of his friends, or even the frequent faintings to which he now became subject, could

could induce him to relax his constant attention to his sister's interest; and in the hope that he might derive some benefit from change of situation, she even urged him to accompany her to Winchester.

Delighted with those expressions of affection to which the former pride and selfishness of the Empress seemed hastily submitting, the Earl congratulated himself on the happy revolution, with a fervency which gave equal pleasure to a sister who now became more dear to him than ever; and in consequence of a civil reception from Stephen of Maud's overtures on this most important occasion, she induced her brother to leave the city of Gloucester, and take up their abode in father Andrew's monastery, where every accommodation the priests could offer were readily accepted.

The

The good superior, who had hitherto considered his royal visitor in a light no ways advantageous to her character as a sovereign or a gentle female, beheld, with a rising veneration, the sweetness of those manners once so harsh and repulsive; while his own carriage evinced, by its respectful yet pleasant tenor, a proof of the opinion he now held.

Maud fully understood from whence the cheerful yet duteous attention he paid her arose, and enjoyed, for the first time, a real ascendancy over her conquered spirit. It was certain, nothing less than the most forcible means could have produced such an event—The detection and dreadful punishment of Trapanti—The strong eloquence and friendship of Lady de Warrenne—With the visible decline of her excellent brother, were all but necessary instruments

ments to effect this important purpose— Even religion, the profession of which had been scarcely observed but as the means of attaining some political end, recovered, or rather established its influence on her mind. Father Andrew availed himself particularly of this grateful change, and inculcated the necessity of her attendance at the different hours of worship. To this the Empress offered no objection, although, when, in the closing evening, she entered the chapel, once awfully distinguished by an appearance not yet elucidated, a slight horror crept through her veins, and she looked round as if half expecting to encounter through the deepening gloom a similar shock.

The sight of that monument which Geoffry Anjou had raised to the memory of a branch of the family, whose name she detested, (for it had been borne

borne by her rival) revived sensations of no very agreeable import; and vespers were concluded before she could recover herself sufficiently to offer her evening orisons.

Lady de Warrenne, in whose company she had traversed the aisles, and who was engaged in some peculiar act of devotion, encouraged the Empress, by her presence, to follow her example; and the chapel was entirely deserted by the priests before Maud had concluded her solemn services. As there were only two large tapers left burning before the high altar, their rays gave but a partial and gloomy reflection of distant objects, while the solemn stillness which succeeded the holy chaunt and sonorous chorus, gave an awful character to the whole scene.

There

There was nothing inviting in the chill aspect of all around to induce a longer stay, and Adela respectfully tendering her arm to the Empress, was leading her to the great entrance—who suddenly stopping, cried—“ We are not
“ alone, lady—I hear footsteps; and see,
“ yonder steals a figure behind the third
“ pillar on our right hand.” “ Some
“ holy person, madam, who like us has
“ been voluntarily detained”—“ Hush,” answered Maud—“ It advances! Oh,
“ heavenly saints—it approaches the
“ monument of Bologne!” “ There is
“ nothing particular in that,” whispered Adela—“ Come, madam, we will retire.
“ You are alarmed—You tremble.”
“ No, my friend—But—ha—the very
“ figure! See, it moves towards the al-
“ tar. The veil! The drapery!”

It was no deception—Maud was not mistaken in her conjectures, although she

she hazarded the reflection of their being rash and unfounded, yet so strongly was its first appearance impressed upon her imagination as to be decided in an opinion which the accidental similarity of dress and attitude might give; for it again seated itself on the base of the monument.

Confounded at a circumstance so mysterious, (yet convinced that her terrors respecting this female were weak and futile) the Empress lost much of her apprehensions, and felt herself determined to seek a full explanation of the cause which produced her wonder, and motioned her friend to advance — when alarmed by the sound of their echoing feet, the figure started up—let fall her veil, and discovered the features of *Matilda!*

Prepossessed

Prepossessed with an idea of her death, (for neither Gloucester nor Adela had as yet touched upon a subject which might inflict unnecessary pains—and were satisfied with their intention of informing the Empress of that lady's existence previous to her audience with Stephen) Maud sunk almost senseless—while Matilda, who was accidentally detained by the absence of her damsel, trembled universally at this sudden encounter—yet joined her services to Lady de Warrenne's for Maud's recovery.

This was soon effected; and assisted by the benevolent endeavours of Adela, Stephen's queen successfully deprecated a wrath by which she had so severely suffered, and ingeniously related as much of her circumstances as she imagined would conciliate rather than irritate.

The

The Empress sighed deeply — She could not behold a woman, so long, and so unjustly persecuted, without feeling a partial remorse ; and although the revolution of her temper and disposition produced in part this new sensation, it could not entirely eradicate the bitter reflection that in the scorned and once detested Matilda, she possibly beheld the possessor of that rank herself had so recently enjoyed. But the sweet humility and unconquered gentleness of that lovely woman, agonized, while it soothed the pangs of departing royalty.

As they were quitting the spot now made memorable by this extraordinary meeting, Matilda pointing to the monument, while a tear of tenderness stole over her yet emaciated cheek, observed to the Empress that it covered the remains of a revered friend and relative who had left Normandy, a prey to the deepest sorrow,

forrow, on account of his wife, seduced (as was supposed) by the Count of Anjou; and that in consequence of some anonymous information, which pointed to Anjou as the cause of his disgrace, Thomas of Bologne, on his arrival in England (which place Plantagenet reached before him, inspired by the hope of succeeding Henry to the throne by a union with his noble daughter) desperately challenged and fought the unprincipled betrayer, to whose superior skill the unfortunate Thomas fell a lamented victim — When struck, as her father supposed, with the fatal event of his unwarrantable passion, the Count erected this monument to his brother's memory, and caused yearly masses to be said for his soul.

Indifferent as Plantagenet had long been to the Empress, she could not hear this fresh instance of his depravity without an indignant shudder — “ Oh, Madam,”

“Madam,” continued the tearful Matilda, (as they were leaving the chapel)
“had you known the worth of that
“excellent man, whose loss his friends
“so truly lamented, *my* conduct in
“visiting the only memento of the
“venerated Thomas, would be easily
“accounted for. It had been my
“custom, when opportunity permitted,
“to visit this monastery, for the purpose of weeping over the dear uncle,
“so truly lamented; and on the very
“morning you first discovered me, I
“had entered the chapel, unknown to
“father Andrew, to pay my accustomed sacrifice of tears and prayers—
“Forgive your servant, lady, when
“she confesses, that terrified at your
“unexpected presence, she shrieked and
“fled”—“But the line,” cried Maud,
“which appeared to me but recently
“written, what was its import?—*Death*
“*shall overcome revenge*—It applies not
“to

“ to Thomas, of Bologne.” Matilda blushed—hesitated—nor dared to give her real motives for the alarming words—But her silence, her confusion told to the heart of Maud an artless tale; and the hue of shame for past errors gave a deeper tint to the countenance of guilt than that which mantled on the cheek of innocence.

If the remembrance of that train of sorrows which retrospection forced upon the Empress, did not kindle in her heart the desire of complete retribution, it greatly lessened her reluctance to resign her state to one so worthy to possess it; and she gave into the plan her brother arranged for her with a cheerfulness that established her claim to his highest commendation.

When Winchester and Stephen were made acquainted with Maud’s pacific manners,

manners towards her once detested foe, they both united in the hope of obtaining their ambitious purposes, without any farther effusion of blood, which a late attempt of her gallant son, Henry, who had suddenly, and without her knowledge, landed in England, made but too probable.

The terms which Earl Robert now offered, were an engagement on the side of his sister, to retire from England, and leave to Stephen the entire possession of its crown, which was to revert, at his decease, to Henry Plantagenet, Maud's son.

The late expectations of the grasping monarch, made this latter clause extremely hard to digest—It militated against his duty as a parent—It cut off the hope of his beloved *Eustace*. But observing the legate turn silent and

melancholy from him as he spoke, Stephen added, "You do not, then, encourage any farther opposition?"—"I do not, indeed—Be patient, my brother, you have need of fortitude"—"Eustace"—"What of Eustace?"—"Is no more!"—"No more!" exclaimed the terrified monarch, "What"—"Oh, Winchester, in pity to a wretched father's feelings, say, what do these fearful words import?"—The bishop hesitated; he had been too abrupt; and wished to soften what his imprudence had too decidedly announced, for in the trembling lip and ashy countenance of his brother, he read the melancholy consequence of this intelligence—"Speak, Henry," added Stephen, "say that my Eustace is indeed no more, and you sign the mandate of hopeless sorrow"—"It is, indeed, too true—We have lost the blossom of England's future expectations—"

“pectations — A sudden death has
“snatched your gallant son from his
“admiring friends, and unsettled the
“noble plans we have been at so
“much trouble to attempt to realize”
—“Then he *is* gone?—My beloved
“boy!—Oh, Henry, for *him* I have
“braved the miseries of war—*His*
“future interest, when hope itself
“seemed almost crushed by the hard
“hand of oppression, and life was
“fluttering on the point of extinction,
“*his* interest renovated the feeble
“system, and urged to fresh exertion
“—Not even the dungeon’s gloom
“could totally, or at all times, quench
“the sweet ray that shot through my
“darkened prospect, and streamed in
“fancy’s eye with reviving glory from
“the throne my fond ambition had
“marked for his inheritance — But
“now”—(here the affectionate father
turned aside to conceal the tear of
disappointed

disappointed tenderness) "now, in-
" deed, the vivid tints are for ever
" flown—a joyless void succeeds—a
" blank which time itself can never
" fill—*Maud* may and will rejoice at
" an event so consonant to her cruel
" principles—The evils she has heaped
" upon a suffering family, prove how
" greatly she will triumph in this sad
" event—Her glorious brother, in-
" deed, knows no such narrow pre-
" judices"—"Yes," cried the legate,
" he is, *indeed*, the friend of mankind,
" and to his proposals we must accede"
—"Yes, be it as Gloucester pleases—
" My comfort—my darling—my eldest
" hope, in whom I delighted, can no
" longer be injured by this determi-
" nation—But what says the dear Ma-
" tilda?—Does she know of this dread-
" ful blow to maternal affection?—
" She does—and receives it with the
" grief of a mother, and the resigna-
tion

“tion of a christian !”—“Sweet creature !—She shall teach me fortitude—
“but indeed she ever went before me
“in all the duties which marked our
“similar stations. Go, Winchester—
“make the best terms you can ; but let
“the distress of a mortified parent, excuse my personal attendance.”

As Stephen concluded this just and pious eulogium on the excellent Matilda's virtues, he was interrupted by that patient sufferer before he had well finished his charge to Winchester. A deep and settled expression of chastened sorrow, dignified, while it influenced every lovely feature. *She* had known variety of afflictions, wounded by the piercing shafts of jealousy, envy, and untamed pride—Mortified in her heart's choicest affection, even to the destruction of a delicate constitution ; yet in every different degree of eventful mis-

fortune her equanimity yielded but once to the claims of a harrassed mind, which had suspended for a time, the functions of a well-turned disposition. *She* was indeed the properest consoler of untameable grief; and although nature's prerogative demanded from this admirable woman its reasonable tribute, and the tears she shed when Stephen, speechless and almost distracted, clasped her to his agonizing bosom proved the momentary triumph of that prerogative. It is true, that for several minutes they both indulged a sensation, which, however indefinable in its essence, is the effect of a sentiment, though painful, yet almost delicious when jointly appropriated, however bitter it may act while confined to a heart, solitary and incommunicable.

"Matilda," cried the weeping father, when the luxury of grief admitted articulation—

ticulation—"Teach me, by thy fortitude and superior powers, to bear this horrible—this inevitable stroke. Oh, say, if it be possible—Say, from whence can we derive a hope of comfort? I *know* you will refer me to the most high—To the crucifix—To our patron saint—But"—"But what, my beloved"—Is not *that* reference sufficient—I feel, *deeply* feel our irreparable loss—So far irreparable as it concerns the deprivation of a dear and invaluable child; yet, while smarting under a presence of weighty calamity, we should not forget that the dispensation is from above—or that the stroke is sanctified by the hand which inflicts it." "These are truly the consolations of an angel," observed the half-conquered Stephen—"yet, to be deprived so unexpectedly of all the parental enjoyment so lately restored"—"All," interrupted Matilda, (her countenance

tenance assuming an austere and solemn cast,—“*All!*—did you say—Alas, “my husband—What would our other “precious blessing, our duteous William think of a parent, whose grief “for one son should banish even the “remembrance of another’s existence!”

This maternal remonstrance lost not its intended effect upon the softened monarch—“Pattern of goodness,” he cried, “whether as wife, mother, or “christian, who is like my Matilda? “—Who like her can teach, by her “sweet example, such forcible lessons “of resignation, fortitude, and true “tenderness of heart, without its imbecility—I was wrong, but she has “corrected me; nor shall the weakness of irrational sorrow controul “the operations of manly reason.”

—“The

The judicious and affectionate applause of such a consort, as Matilda boasted, could not fail of producing a sweet effect on her tranquillized mind, while the look with which she received it, was composed of the various sentiments by which that mind was impregnated; and before they separated she beheld in her lord's guarded expression of his grief, a proof of the wonders her affecting representation had wrought.

The legate immediately put every thing in a train for the execution of the treaty; and Maud would have signed away her present rights with cheerfulness, but the claims of a proud heart were not to be annihilated so easily. Softened and improved by various causes, it still retained a feature of its former propensities, and swelled with a transient pang of retrospection.

Glou-

Gloucester, who saw and allowed for the natural reluctance, would have supported her while she traced her name upon the instrument; but pale, weak, and trembling, it was with difficulty he added his own signature, and staggering against the legate, who stood beside him, faintly whispered, "I would die at Gloucester—Adieu, " my sister."

Distracted with this horrid termination of her ultimate wishes, the Empress could scarcely give the necessary commands for means to convey her dying brother to his beloved city; but on this occasion, the legate humanely assisted; and Earl Robert resigned his last breath at his own stately palace.

That a nobleman so inflexible in an opposite cause should be lamented with

with the truest regret, was a circumstance not easily paralleled—Even the new established king, who had, indeed, been eventually preserved by this great and good man, mixed the tears of friendship with those that fell for the death of Eustace.

The innocence and purity of Matilda's ideas, suffered no diminution from the sorrow *she* expressed at a loss so extreme—But the grief of Maud, wild, turbulent, and impatient, was beyond alleviation. Left alone in the world without a male protector, and deprived even of the solace unlimited power once ensured her, she retired in deep disgust from England, and sought, in foreign climates, a *change*, at least of sorrow, which could only be relieved by the prospect of her son's future dignity.

Lady

Lady de Warrenne, who could not leave her home, now rendered more precious by the expected return of her husband, passed her lonely hours in the mournful contemplation of that worth she so justly appreciated, and had for ever lost; and in running the parallel between Maud and her invaluable brother, observed how much the exercise of superior virtues contributes to an effectual mastery of the passions—an indulgence of the latter producing only ineffectual repentance—while the triumph of the former appears brilliant, even in disappointment.

FINIS.